



SPECIMEN



TAKE A BOUGH

As we move through the 21st century, the agriculture sector is at the forefront of technological innovation, employing new holistic solutions to analyse every aspect of production, end to end. Globally, producers face new challenges, from the need to meet ever increasing demand for high quality product, to ensuring sustainability and managing the impact of their activities on the wider environment. At the leading edge of this new field, which aims to look at old fields in a new way, is Agrimotion Consulting, based in South Africa. Paul Knight spoke to Director and CEO Coenraad Fraenkel about what makes Agrimotion an industry leader.



Coenraad Fraenkel is unambiguous in stressing the importance of environmental sustainability to the future of his industry. “Climate change is a reality, and the sustainable use of natural resources like water is becoming more and more critical,” he said. “The change in weather is something we cannot manipulate, and we need to constantly innovate to be able to stay at the top of market trends.”

Undoubtedly, the history of agriculture is a history of technological innovation. Even the earliest producers relied on their ability to analyse complex information gleaned from a wide variety of sources. Our earliest calendars and methods to predict the weather, or to plan for and manage the impact of adverse environmental conditions are all intimately tied to the business of agriculture.



Nothing has changed across the years – and yet everything has. Each generation develops new solutions to the old problems, and right now, innovation in agriculture means data analysis.

Newly developed technologies allow producers to measure and collect data in a revolutionary level of detail. This, however, is only part of the story. Of equal importance is the ability to correlate the mass of data produced, to analyse this and use it to make recommendations designed to ensure users optimise their yields.

In recognition of this, Agrimotion Consulting, located in Somerset West on the outskirts of Cape Town, has made training central to its mission, mentoring and teaching producers how to make the latest advances in technology work for them.

Pragmatic and innovative

The result of this process has been the development of new solutions including an app, IRIS (Integrated Response Irrigation Scheduling), which allows the user to monitor data in the field or in the office with equal ease. This marriage of the pragmatic and the innovative is at the core of Agrimotion’s success.

With a background in soil science, Coenraad Fraenkel, Director and CEO of the company, is not a man afraid to get his hands dirty. This said, his vision – harnessing the power of agriculture to transform cultures and countries – is broad and optimistic.

“Agrimotion believes that agriculture forms the culture of a country and by having a positive impact on agriculture we can shape the future of countries for the better,” he said. “We do this by being an independent, scientific and precise soundboard to fruit producing enterprises globally.”



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The stated aim of this activity is “to set the standard for best practices in soil management and fruit production through ethical and sustainable solutions.”

Agrimotion Consultancy is an agent for positive change in the world. Mr Fraenkel, a native South African, is clearly motivated by a desire to create positive changes in African countries by helping to grow economies and improve social conditions through agriculture.

“Why fruit?” He continued. “It’s labour intensive, and is exported – thus earning foreign currency, something Africa is in dire need of.”

Regarding the technological advances and the new solutions which the company represents to fruit producers, he has a further point – by optimising operations, “smaller areas are disturbed, and thus resources are not exploited.”

A budding consultancy

Mr Fraenkel has every right to feel optimistic, given the success Agrimotion has enjoyed in the relatively short time since the company began operations.

“In the first six years we have put together the biggest independent consultancy working on fruit on the African continent. We have expanded from five consultants working only in the Western Cape of South Africa to a team of 12 working actively in 16 different countries,” he said.

Agrimotion currently has two offices (Somerset West and Nelspruit, South Africa), three support staff and 12 consultants in various disciplines ranging from soil science, horticulture, irrigation, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and plant health.

“We have always believed that there should be a balance between the number of employees on ground level and the use of technology to be able to serve our clients efficiently,” noted Mr Fraenkel. “This we have done by introducing fruit specialist teams and inhouse developed applications for data capturing, analysis and reporting.”

The latest techniques combine static orchard information with dynamic data like yield, soil analysis, leaf analysis and irrigation monitoring to provide producers with site specific trends that assist in better decision making in the future.

The resulting analysis on one hand allows producers to optimise their potential yields, but on the other, also to minimise risk and plan for the adverse impact of challenging environmental factors such as flooding or periods of drought.

“The Agrimotion Irrigation team serviced major fruit producing enterprises in the Western Cape when it was recently hit by the worst drought in 103 years,” stated Mr Fraenkel. “With the hands-on effective irrigation scheduling, significant water saving strategies were implemented and “Day Zero” was avoided.

“At the end of the 2017/2018 season, some of the larger clients could release water back into the Theewaterskloof Dam for the use

of human consumption for the city of Cape Town. This would not have been possible if it was not for the focus and dedication of the Agrimotion Irrigation team.”

Sharing hope through agriculture

The previously mentioned achievement is just one of many positive stories.

“Each division of the Agrimotion team has enjoyed success stories in the last six years,” acknowledged Mr Fraenkel. “The Soil Classification and Orchard Design team, for example, has set up new greenfield projects in South Africa and various international countries like Brazil, Mozambique, Ghana and Angola.

“One example is a major macadamia and avocado development in central Mozambique where the development has stimulated the economy in that region to such an extent that retailers, fertilizer depots, tractor servicing depots, and clinics have been started – and the future of the region has changed for the better.”

Agrimotion has more than a dream of transforming economies and improving lives – it has the expertise on hand and the technology available to make this vision a reality, combined with a confidence and optimism borne of seeing it work in the field.



“It is extremely important that all our associates and key clients buy in to the vision of sharing hope,” emphasised the CEO. “Our service providers will always be informed of the impact that their service has on Agrimotion and the ripple effect it has on the people on ground level in the middle of Africa.”

He concluded: “We are a highly skilled team of individuals driven by a vision of building trust and sharing hope through agriculture. We believe that our recommendations and the relationships that we have with our clients can change the way people in Africa see agriculture – and change the future of Africa.” ■

