farmer is a dedicated professional with a passion for what he or she farms, who runs a farming enterprise as a business founded on sustainable production practices. Having only dedicated, passionate and successful goat farmers will significantly contribute to reducing unemployment and poverty.

Emerging commercial goat farmers must be given ownership of their farms so that they can use this as collateral to access capital and production loans. They must also be equipped with superior animal production knowledge and skills.

A successful commercial goat operation cannot be achieved passively; all aspirant commercial goat farmers must first obtain animal husbandry, stockmanship, grazing management and business management skills so that they can be actively involved in their farming operations. They must also have the business acumen to run their farms as profit-generating businesses. These farms must be able to cover production costs and the repayment of loans. Profits must be reinvested into the business.

Emerging commercial goat farmers need to fully understand the industry, so that they are not taken advantage of by unscrupulous traders who would underpay them for their goats. They must thus be able to negotiate the highest possible price based on market demand, and must also be capable of marketing goats directly off their farms.

SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES

Goat farmers need to urgently adopt sustainable goat farming practices, especially in terms of grazing. The communal grazing practice currently used benefits neither the farmer nor the livestock, as there is often an ongoing battle between livestock owners for the best available grazing. Grazing is also often quite poor as a result of over-grazing.

Communally grazed livestock usually have no set breeding seasons, and control over breeding is often lacking. Spread of disease is also a significant challenge. All of these issues result in the low productivity and quality of these animals.

Management input is inversely related to a farmer's financial input into the operation. This means that the less effective the farmer's management of his or her farming operation, the greater the costs of the operation, and the lower the profit generated by the business. To take an example from the current drought, those farmers who were not proactive and did not implement feed banks, or save some grazing camps to mitigate the

effects of the current drought, are worse off than farmers with high management input, were proactive and who planned ahead.

It is important for all goat farmers to remember that smallstock farming is not something that can be done by remote control. It is a full-time, hands-on occupation that requires passion, hard work and dedication.

MANAGEMENT SCHEME

My goat farming business operates on three pillars. If any of these pillars is not given full consideration, my whole operation will fail.

The first pillar is my Boer goats' genetics. Top-quality genetics produce top-quality animals and production, while sub-standard genetics produce poor animals and production.

The second pillar is animal health. While livestock pharmaceuticals are often expensive, they are vital. Goat farmers who take shortcuts in animal health, such as skipping vaccinations, dewormings and dippings, do so at their own peril.

The third pillar is nutrition, and here I am not referring to feedlotting. Goats are adapted to veld grazing and browsing, and have outstanding disease and parasite resistance. This means that goats of superior genetics who benefit from good management require some of the lowest input costs of all livestock. However, they still require excellent supplementary nutrition during certain times in the breeding cycle for maximum production.

Planning is essential in a commercial goat farming business. It is important to understand the trends in the increasing demand for goat meat, and to factor in the effect of nature's cycles when working towards meeting these demands. This will help ensure maximum profitability and sustainability.
– *Lloyd Phillips*