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Surviving Drought on Encroacher Bush Species

Salomo Kauari on his
communal farm



How a Farmer Ensured the Continuation
of his Farm on Self-made Animal Feed



Salomo demonstrates how he uses his hammer mill machine to grind branches from encroacher species into smaller pieces for use in his animal feed.

The thornveld savanna of the Otjozondjupa Region of Namibia is, while beautiful and expansive, in some places so overgrown, that a wall of vegetation allows nothing through. This area is also home to the village Omaze-ra, home of the Kauari family.

Salomo Kauari, like his father before him, is a full-time farmer. He is a communal farmer and a member of the African Wild Dog Communal Conservancy. As the thick rain clouds of a good rainy season build above us, Salomo proudly demonstrates how his innovations and training enabled him to weather the recent drought.

Farming was always in his blood, and even when he left the farm to work in the capital city, Windhoek, he did so for 15 years at one of the largest agricultural retail entities. While there, he also took the time to attend as many training opportunities as he could and learnt about "animal health and nutrition".

Then in 2014, when his father passed away, Salomo returned home, to begin what he was always meant to do. His understanding of the value of learning had been established during his time working in the capital city, so his priority now, as a full-time farmer, was to learn more.

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How Training Sparked Innovation

According to Salomo, he had an added advantage because of the training he attended, as he explains, "I attended courses by GIZ. The first training I attended was the 19th Rangeland Forum in Otjiwarongo, which was mostly on adaptation to climate change. Then I attended the 21st Rangeland Forum, also in Otjiwarongo where the bush-based feed booklet was launched. This was my first time to hear about bush-to-feed and link to drought. The training helped me a lot because you get different ideas. Some you can use, and others you can't, but it helped me a lot."

Salomo continued to attend as many training courses as he could over the years, especially those on the topic of bush-based animal feed, "from there I decided I



Salomo with his finished protein blocks. These he created using his own recipe.

So when I came back home, I could try to make different recipes for different animals.

have to buy my own machine. It was around April 2019 that I bought my own machine. "I also attended a bush-based animal feed production workshop and training of trainers workshop that year. I was just collecting experience on bush-to-feed: on how to prepare it; how to make some rations and some recipes for different animals. So when I came back home, I could try it. At that time, I was just trying to make different recipes for different animals."

Salomo purchased a hammer mill machine, which is used to grind material into small pieces. What he didn't know then, was that by investing in his bush-to-feed production, he was ensuring a lifeline for his family farm.

Surviving the Drought

The area where Omazera is situated, would normally receive around 350-400mm of annual rainfall. Namibia has however, been in the grips of a nine-year drought since 2012, with rainfall averages dropping each year. "2019 was also the time our rainfall was very low. In 2018 we had about 290mm, and in 2019 we only had 130mm", explains Salomo. "I knew I had to make a plan. I used the bushes. I made different recipes, for survival or maintenance feed. This was how my twelve calves survived the drought."

"The mothers of the calves died in the drought, so I had to try help the calves survive. I used a mixture of bush feed, bran, molasses syrup and salt. If it was not for the idea that I got from most of the trainings of using bush-to-feed, I could have lost everything - even the bull itself. Other farmers were asking me, 'how come my bull is so fat when theirs are thin and dying', but my bull didn't even lose its condition."

Salomo's Process and Innovation

Salomo uses biomass for his animal feed, from encroaching species, which he then mixes with other food supplements such as bran and molasses. "You take the problematic bushes, the encroaching bushes, you then cut off the branches, and put them in the hammer mill. When you are finished you put them on a black sheet to dry. I have found though, that it's better to cut and leave the bushes in the field overnight before they go in the hammer mill machine. Then most of the water is out. After you dry the feed on a sheet, you can mix it to feed to the cattle."



Salomo with his 1kg bags of activated charcoal that he makes and sells on to other farmers.



Salomo's invented a solution to his process, by welding this barrel to make an animal feed mixer.

To further the ease of his process, Salomo welded an old barrel for mixing, you put all ingredients in the barrel and roll it (on the ground) and it comes out already mixed" says Salomo, proudly showing off his innovation that has already impressed his farming neighbours.

While he experimented to perfect his recipe for bush based animal feed, Salomo has also created a recipe for protein blocks, which are made using a mix of tree "pods, mixed with bran, a bit of phosphate, molasses syrup, water and salt." He has also started the production of activated charcoal, which came about in response to a common problem faced by farmers here. As Salomo explains, "from September to January we have a problem with poisonous plants in our area". Salomo now uses his hammer mill to create charcoal powder which can be added to the livestock's drinking water to help reduce toxins and prevent poisoning. "With the same machine and the same process, I also make activated charcoal. I pack this into 1kg bags and sell it to other farmers, the product helps that their cattle do not die from their poisonous plants."

Climate Change and Farming Today

Salomo notes that farming today is very different from farming in years gone by. This he feels, is why it is so

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important for farmers to be adapting and looking for sustainable innovations in farming practices. "Climate change has affected everything and has also changed everything. When I grew up, my father didn't even use most of the supplements we use. They didn't even vaccinate their cattle as often. Nowadays if you have small stock, you have to vaccinate them four times a year. I don't know, there's a lot of diseases nowadays" says Salomo with a sigh.

"The other challenge is that the grazing areas are be-



A view of Salomo's products after being through the hammer mill. On the left is the activated charcoal and on the right is the finely chopped branches that he will now use to make his animal feed.

coming smaller because there are a lot of camps around. Everything is fenced, so I have to plan how to let mine survive in a small space. So, I have to supplement. Farming is very different."

The Future is in Sharing Ideas

Despite the many challenges, Salomo is optimistic about the future. "I am very proud of where my operation is going. There are always many challenges in farming, but the trainings happened in the same period that we faced a drought, and it helped me. It meant my cattle and livestock could survive the drought."

Salomo now shares his knowledge and learning with other farmers as a mentor. "I'm currently a livestock mentor for Agribank, so I also advise farmers on ideas, mostly on livestock, animal health and animal nutrition. I started with FSP, Farmers Support Programme, which was funded by GIZ, and now I am a part of Agribank's Advisory Services Division for three years serving Otjozondjupa East. This programme gives advice and trains farmers in different areas." It links one mentor to ten farmers in the area, who then visits these ten farms every month. "So you visit every month, see how they are doing or if they are having problems."

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"It's very rewarding because farmers are doing many practical experiments," says Salomo with a smile, "so when you are talking with farmers you will learn something you didn't know."

Salomo feels there is still a need for more support in the animal feed sector, as it's an emerging sector, and there is still much to learn. However, he also feels that farmers are good communicators, and as they continue to share their experience, the sector will grow.

His advice to anyone wanting to learn more about this sector is to "attend information days and visit workshops. That's where you get the information, and if you are a farmer you really need that information. Auctions are a great place to get information, even if you are not selling, you might meet a farmer who gives you an idea" notes Salomo.

"Start where you can, reach out to relevant advisory services so that you can have the right idea when to start and how to start. If you can afford the machinery, then buy that, but if you can't afford the machinery you can still start, just start where you can."

The Future for Salomo

Salomo says he knows he is where he belongs and is excited to see where the journey will take him. "My father schooled us and fed us with farming. When I look back, my background was always just farming. I knew that I needed to take the experience I got, back to the farm."

"I'm very proud because every year, I go a step ahead, it's good. I have expanded, I now have a big warehouse, I have more livestock and I have diversified my livestock, because I now even have chickens and a small vegetable garden. I am very happy, other farmers also approach me for advice. Every move I make feels like a step ahead".

Further sources:

Booklet: ► [Animal Feed from Namibian Encroacher Bush](#)

Video: ► [Turning encroacher bush into fodder](#)

Faces and Stories: ► [Salomo Kauari](#)

Aksente Magazine: ► [A Prickly Solution](#)