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NATIVES LEARNING IRRIGATION

ENCOURAGING RESULTS OF TAUNGS SCHEME.

by

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## TAUNGS IRRIGATION SCHEME

by

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The Taungs Irrigation Scheme is the largest irrigation scheme in South Africa, farmed by Natives. It is situated in the Taungs district, the country of the Bathlaping tribe. Already nearly 4,000 morgen can be irrigated and when completed an area of approximately 6,000 morgen will be under irrigation.

### WATER SUPPLY:

The water, for both the Taungs and the Vaalhartz schemes, is obtained from the mighty Vaal River. The storage dam, known as the Vaaldam, is situated above Vereeniging, 360 miles away from the irrigable areas. From this dam the water flows down the Vaal river and is then stored behind the Vaalhartz weir a few miles above Warrenton. From there it is distributed to the various areas by three canals. The canal that supplies water to Taungs is known as the main canal and is 65 miles long.

This canal, skilfully designed and constructed, cuts through mountains and also crosses several streams and rivers. It passes underneath the Hartz river by way of an underground syphon that is more than three miles long. This canal not only brings water to the barren areas of Taungs but also work, food and prosperity to a large section of the Bathlaping tribe.

The canal and the "feeders", that supply the water to the different landblocks, were constructed by the Irrigation Department. The South African Native Trust is, however, responsible for the levelling of the plots, the construction of the community furrows and the settlement of the land.

### DEVELOPMENT AND SUB-DIVISION:

The following is a very brief description of how a landblock is developed. First all the large trees are removed from the land. This is done mainly by hand, but for the removal of very big trees it is essential to use a tractor. On the completion of this task, powerful crawler tractors, fitted with graders, are brought into operation. There are at present eight of these machines and they work as a unit. One is used to remove the small trees and bush, one to level furrows and holes and to remove hillocks, and the rest are employed for the final levelling of the land and the construction of irrigation beds. All these machines are handled by Native drivers and grader operators. They all earn high wages, and most of the men have been working on the scheme for several years.

When the above operations have been completed concrete community furrows, that take the water to the individual lands, are constructed. Proper roads are constructed between the lands, and to prevent wind erosion all landblocks are surrounded by windbreaks of trees. Where possible each landblock of 30 morgen, is provided with a small storage dam, so that it is not essential for the plotheolders to irrigate at night or on Sundays. Landblocks are also properly fenced.

All the/...

All the above development work is at present done by three European members of the engineering staff, assisted by the Native drivers already mentioned and several artisans and Native workmen.

The cost of this development work is high and is all borne by the South African Native Trust. The land is, however, used to the best advantage and settlers can, on being allotted a plot, immediately commence with the production of food and cash crops.

#### ALLOTMENTS:

Each settler is allotted two morgen of land and deserving families can get an additional 1/5th morgen for the production of fruit and vegetables.

Apart from the above allotments there are also sections set aside for vegetable and fruit production. These are known as widows' gardens and are allocated to the widows and old people of the tribe.

The allotment of plots is done by the Native Commissioner in consultation with the agricultural staff, the Chief and his Headmen. A person is allotted a land only when the Chief and officials are satisfied that he will cultivate it properly.

#### RENT:

No rent is paid but each plot owner must pay £2 per annum maintenance fees for water services, roads, fencing and so on.

Taungs is situated in a very dry area and before the scheme was constructed the people mainly lived from what they earned as migratory labourers and from the proceeds of their flocks and herds. Small areas of dry land were also cultivated, but the income from these was very unreliable, with the result that few of the plot-owners know how to cultivate land properly. Irrigation farming was something quite new to all of them. Settlers therefore, especially for the first few years, must work under constant supervision and receive daily guidance.

#### ADVICE AND CONTROL:

To assist the Native Commissioner to develop, settle and control the area, the following technical staff is employed. In direct control of the scheme is a Superintendent. He is assisted in the development work by the engineering staff already mentioned and by three agricultural officers, several agricultural overseers and foremen and 20 trained Native demonstrators. The demonstrators are each in direct charge of a landblock of 60 to 80 allotments. In addition to the above there is also a Senior Demonstrator in charge of the nursery where trees and plants are grown for the area. The most senior of the Native staff is Assistant Overseer Ben Melamu. This official is mainly used for the training of newly appointed demonstrators.

All the above officials are there to assist the people and also to enforce the rules and regulations. Very concise regulations are laid down in Proclamation No. 4 of 1943. These ensure that the plots are properly cultivated and that the engineering works are protected. Every effort is made to obtain the voluntary co-operation of the plot-owner and to ensure that steady progress is maintained. Unco-operative people are, however, forced by law to abide by the regulations and in extreme cases the allotment is cancelled and re-allotted to a more deserving member of the tribe.

#### CROPS AND MARKETING:

The main crops cultivated are the following: wheat, peas and lentils in winter; and mealies, cowpeas, mungbeans and groundnuts in/...

in summer. Fruit and vegetables are also grown and recently the establishment of lucerne was also commenced. It is hoped that eventually large areas will be under lucerne, as it is an excellent soil improver and the best hay crop under cultivation.

The yield per allotment varies a great deal and depends on several factors, such as the fertility of the soil, the availability of manure, fertilizer and suitable equipment. The most important factor, to my mind, however, is the industry and ability of the allotment holder.

On the average the soil is not fertile, but it fortunately responds quickly to the application of manure and fertilizer and the average plot-owner can make a good living. Last year several plot-owners produced all their basic food requirements and still sold produce worth over £150.

The average yields per morgen, over the last three years, were as follows: wheat 12 bags, mealies 10 bags, peas 4 bags, cowpeas 6 bags, lentils 10 bags. These yields cannot be considered as entirely satisfactory but a pleasing feature is that yields are, in most areas, improving from year to year. Record yields of up to 34 bags of wheat per morgen have been reaped recently. During 1950, a particularly good year, crops valued at £17,655 were handed to the department store for re-sale and in addition local traders also purchased produce valued at several thousand pounds. Owners are not compelled to market their crops through the department, but they are encouraged to do so as they invariably obtain a better price when they are sold on the larger markets of the country.

Apart from the sale of grain, plot-owners also derive an income from their fruit and vegetables. There are also two milk producing schemes, the members of the milk schemes derive a monthly income from £2 to £5. During the last year, 35 members sold milk and cream for a total of £1,340. The Department assists new members of the milk schemes by providing them with good cows at a very reasonable price. Good Jersey bulls are also provided to improve the milk production of the herds.

#### GENERAL:

In several other respects the scheme has also assisted the people. There are two timber plantations from which hut and fencing poles are sold to the people. The tribal school which has been provided with 20 morgen of irrigation land, provides valuable training to the scholars. It is also hoped that in the near future this land will produce revenue that can be utilised for the improvement of the school.

Even other districts benefit from the scheme. The Department cultivates 120 morgen of land and although the main object is to provide good seed for the plot-owners and hay for the Departmental animals, surplus crops are sent to other districts. In some years up to 500 tons of lucerne are provided to feed oxen engaged on soil conservation work and breeding sires used in other districts.

Apart from the obvious financial benefits, the scheme has assisted the people by providing an abundance of good food. The District Surgeon is of the opinion that the average Bathlaping child is to-day much healthier and better fed than 10 years ago.

Even to the non-farmers the scheme has been a blessing. Native-owned shops are on the increase and there are several Bantu artisans and contractors that make a good living. Recently two plot owners purchased/...



purchased tractors to cultivate crops and to plough their own and their neighbours' lands. This is a most healthy sign.

At present the South African Native Trust carts manure for the people and threshes their crops. The people pay for these services. The officials are anxious that such functions should be performed by private native organisations or individual contractors.

The aim of the Department is eventually to assist the people to start, as their European neighbours on the Vaalhartz Scheme have done, their own co-operative society, that will handle all the crops of the members and purchase their manure, fertilizer and implements for them.

The irrigation scheme has naturally cost the Department thousands of pounds and heavy expenditure is still incurred annually, but it can be considered a success. New schemes are contemplated and it is hoped that by next April, the development unit will move to Mayen, where a very promising 300 morgen scheme is now being planned.

Irrigation schemes are, as said before, expensive undertakings, but they will assist a great deal in absorbing the surplus populations from the reserves. In spite of the expense, I am confident, that the Government will establish many more schemes, provided that the people make full use of the land and water made available, and show, as the Bathlaping have done, their appreciation by co-operating with the officials of the Department.

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