

Africa Tour - Part 2 - Peanut Processing and Water Table Farms

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[Click here](#) to read Part 1.

On the second morning, after great accommodations on the game farm, we rose to the sounds of all sorts of wildlife on the lake. It is a hunting area so the animals are wary and keep their distance. Only long telephoto lenses allowed us to get detail of the many antelope, zebra and other species that kept themselves at least 300 yards away from us. The ducks, storks and other water birds were a delight to Koos, who began naming them by their color patterns and sounds.

We have rented a seven passenger Volkswagen van that is right hand drive with a five speed stick shift on the left hand. Maurice Clark was game to drive it, on the left side of the road. His skill is only exceeded by his determination and he kept us safe as we drove on the left and passed on the right.

In the town of [Mafikeng](#) is a peanut processing facility called “New Nut Company” owned by Gerhard Dreyer who goes by “Herric.” He again greeted us warmly, but informed us that we were in his business that has sanitary standards so that it qualifies to ship peanuts to the European Union (EU). After signing releases and donning white coats and white hairnets, which Koos and I really didn’t need, we were led through the plant from the scale to storage to unloading to processing.

The plant employs about 80 workers compared to 400 when Heric bought it. He explains that he has put in automation in some areas where human capabilities are far less than the sorting and grading equipment he has installed. We followed the nuts along a conveyor belt from unloading the raw unshelled peanuts to the final bagging for shipment.

New Nut Company keeps all farmer shipments separate. The final bags are identify preserved so trace-back can be all the way to the original grower. This requires only one lot to be handled at a time. The peanuts are mechanically shelled and dumped on high speed sorters that put them in three categories that I will call whole unblemished, variable and immature. The best go for the highest rate and the machines and employees on the line pick through to remove any that don't meet top standards.

They are weighed and bagged before being moved to warehouses for shipment. The cracked mature peanuts are made into peanut butter and have the same quality as the other grade, but don't have the uniformity and size. The peanut plant will continue to bloom all season and some nuts are small and immature but they still have some value as oil and other low quality uses.

I was impressed by the sanitary handling of the nuts through the process. Many of the systems were identical to those in the United States as South Africa shows capability to compete in the world market. Europe has had a long tradition of buying food from African nations so it is not a new market to sell into the EU.

We had a few minutes to use Internet in Heric's office and we were off to see his cattle and fields. At mid-day in October it felt like late spring. The sun was hot and the land was popcorn dry. Cattle were in good condition. Most carried some "ear" as they were Brahma cross. Heric had a herd that was all European breeds with a beautiful Charolias bull and cows that were big framed and may have been Simmental but appeared to be a two way cross.

We noticed that there were many people in the corn fields picking up ears and putting them in sacks. He allows his employees and families to "glean" the fields as there is a significant amount of grain that is lost. The reason, he said, was because they move their maize directly into bag storage at about 12.5 percent moisture (much dryer than Midwest harvest). The corn gathered by the workers is shelled and ground into meal. Twenty percent is given back to them as meal suitable for porridge.

He had dug a hole with a back hoe especially to make a point about the farms he owns. The soil is coarse and mostly sand. It is light red but looks bright red when it blows. Even though the top 18 inches was powder dry it progressively became wetter as one looked down and saw roots of last year's crop exposed at the six foot level. At the bottom of the hole was standing water. That is very important as not every farm has "water table" fields that have a source of water under them.

He will rip and till the soil about 18-inches deep and then plant corn (maize) at standard depth. Since it is already getting to 90 degrees during the day, it will sprout quickly and he will fertilize often with small amounts.

In about four months, he will harvest and expects seven tons per hectare. Converted to our measurement, that will be about 112 bushels of white corn per acre. He promises video to show the progress and the result of the harvest.

-Ken Root

Ken Root is filing reports this week from Southern Africa, where it is early spring and – as part of an expedition that is being underwritten by [Peoples Company](#) – the veteran ag broadcaster along with photographer Michael McClean and investment analyst Maurice Clark are taking a close look at

agricultural potential in three countries: South Africa, Mozambique and Zambia. The U.S. team including of Root, McClean and Clark, arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa, on the evening of Sunday, October 5, following a 16-hour flight from Atlanta. Monday morning, following a 10-hour flight from London, they were joined by Koos DeKlerk, an area-farm manager, and Susan Payne, executive chairman of [EmVest](#).