

# EBENEZER MATOBO

They did it!! Congratulations to our 45 first years who in early October celebrated their graduation from the 3-month Foundation Course. The first three months at Ebenezer can be particularly challenging as apprentices adjust to community living, early mornings and some physically demanding farm work. Therefore, it is always with a huge sense of achievement that they mark their graduation and parents' day, with families coming to appreciate what these young people have accomplished. This year we were delighted to welcome Washington Ngirazi as our guest of honour, a previous team member who is now running his own successful farming enterprise. Washington can speak with the authority of experience and we appreciated his challenge and encouragement to our graduates. The majority of them have continued with us into the Intermediate Course.

Having received a grant for new ablution blocks at Ebenezer, we have been amazed at the speed of progress in seeing them materialise this month! With one block each for guys and girls, each ablution has five toilets and showers as well as a spacious area with three laundry sinks. Alongside our recent addition of dorm bunk beds, we are feeling very blessed in our living areas!

Block 2 and the start of the Intermediate Course got off to a great start in late October. Within the first week alone, apprentices had been introduced to the correct handling of chemicals, the question of 'Who is the Holy Spirit?' and a record-keeping challenge in their business lessons that involves baking lots of cakes! It's going to be an exciting block.



# CROPPING

October has been a productive month, with the start of our tomato harvest. Fruits ripened sooner than expected due to hot weather and so we are harvesting ahead of schedule.

Our current crops in the ground are 1 hectare of cucumber, 6 hectares of butternut, 3 hectares of watermelon, 5 hectares of tomato and half a hectare of maize. With good temperatures and consistent water supply, we are set for a busy harvesting season ahead of us!

Crops in the ground are looking good and healthy. Tomatoes are in the process of being trellised and apprentices have been extra busy weeding this month to ensure all of our crops are weed-free. We have noticed some bollworm affecting our tomatoes, but quick action with spraying means we are on top of the problem and it should not affect our harvest.

Having gap-filled our watermelon crop that had shown poor germination from its original planting, we are pleased that we are now seeing an 85% germination rate.

We have still been facing the challenge of animals trying to eat our crops, but good progress was made this month on the installation of a fence around our fields. We have so far surrounded about half of our cropping area and this has made the situation much more manageable.











# LIVESTOCK

By the end of October, our dairy was milking 22 cows which were producing an average of 9.74 litres of milk per cow per day. Frustrations with our generator have made it a challenge to keep milk chilled and as a result we have not been able to sell the quantity we would like. Six of our cows gave birth in October, producing 4 male and 2 female calves. We are glad for the new arrivals and the increased number of cows in production.

High temperatures this month have been stretching our layer teams to ensure a comfortable environment for our birds, with temperatures reaching 42°C on some days. This has resulted in higher mortalities, however lay-rates have remained steady and strong, hitting or exceeding our targets in each house. This is particularly impressive in our two aged flocks who are continuing to go strong despite their age and the heat!

Mixed weather in October also had an affect on our broiler birds. Unseasonal cold weather at the start of the month meant the birds lacked appetite and were not gaining weight. As the month progressed, the situation improved and we saw weights increase. However, subsequent spikes in temperature meant that our mortality increased. On closing our batch, we recorded a mortality throughout the batch of 13%, much higher than our 5% target. Despite this, we achieved good weights with the birds that we sent to slaughter and still made a good profit of 37.5 c per bird, a total profit of USD 4,500 for the batch. Hats off to our broiler team for winning despite the challenges faced!












# INTRODUCING...

Spend any time at Ebenezer Matobo and you'll soon bump into Brendon Nkala, not one of our staff team but the Hamara Operations Manager for their Broiler Value Chain. In this role, Brendon oversees 253 small-scale contract farmers who are between them growing 33,000 broiler chickens in 6-week cycles. Hamara provides the inputs and market, and the farmers grow the birds and share the profit!.

"What does this have to do with Ebenezer?" you ask. Essential to this operation are 7 Field Officers who work on the ground with the small-scale farmers, coaching them, providing technical support and organising the logistics for placing and uplifting each batch of birds. And, you guessed it, all 7 of these Field Officers are Ebenezer graduates. We asked Brendon why this is the case: "Because they have received the right training. Beyond the technical skills required, they have received the spiritual and community grade training that's needed to communicate well with farmers and be accepted into the community."

For us, it has been gratifying to see our Ebenezer graduates continue to grow in their skills and capacity under Brendon's leadership. Starting as assistant Field Officers in training, they soon take on greater responsibilities. An example of this is 2020 graduate, Providence Dube, who is now in Bulawayo managing all the administration for the entire operation. This includes co-ordinating finances, analysing results, overseeing procurement and more!

When asked what he likes about Ebenezer, Brendon says, "I like the practicality of the training. There's a hang of a lot people can do with their own hands, rather than just learning theory about it." His advice to apprentices is: "Focus! When living in a large group it's easy to get derailed from your reason to be here, so focus and reach your goals."