

# Matriarch Loader ideal for farms using sub-surface drip irrigation

**Modern day farming methods, especially those pertaining to crops under irrigation with special fertilizer and supplement feeds, are increasingly becoming determining factors when it comes to selecting harvesting equipment.**

One such case is that of the farm Allan Ridge near Komatipoort in Mpumalanga. Here, Manager Dane Ralfe has recently changed his cane loader to fit in with the ‘fertigation’ sub-surface drip irrigation methods he uses on his sugar cane, which is under irrigation from the nearby Komati River.

“Our latest form of irrigation is sub-surface drip irrigation, where the dripper pipes are laid during planting under the surface, below the cane stools. Given the inaccessibility

of these pipes, it is imperative that no machinery crosses the cane rows and potentially damage the dripper pipes,” Ralfe tells us. “This applies to our cane loading as well and we saw the solution to a potential problem in the new Matriarch ULTeco5 Slew Loader.”

“My father Denzil attended the Sugarfest at Amatikulu in Zululand in 2014 where the Matriarch ULTeco5 was on display and what impressed him was that it was the most cost effective machine we could find,” Ralfe adds. “As it’s a slew loader, it was also the most effective machine in following our irrigation lines and therefore ideally suited to our purposes.”

“Another important factor is that we can safely bank on less stool damage and therefore more ratoons as the

Matriarch ULTeco5 Loader follows the lines and, coupled with the irrigation, we should enjoy higher production over time.”

The Matriarch ULTeco5 Slew Loader is marketed and maintained by Bell Equipment, a company that Ralfe and his farm Allan Ridge, know well. Ralfe started hauling his own cane to the nearby Komati mill in 2011 using a Bell 1766 Haulage Tractor pulling double trailers with a total payload of 25 tons. This cane was loaded using a Bell 125A Cane Loader.

“The Matriarch ULTeco5 Slew Loader is the ideal machine for our application as its wheel base comfortably fits our rows and we make use of the standard cane grab,” Ralfe adds. “Using the machine to load our double trailers has trimmed about 15 minutes off each cycle and to date our best hauls in a 24-hour cycle have numbered nine round trips to the mill, 14 kilometres away.”

During the cane harvesting season Allan Ridge farm works two 12-hour shifts and Ralfe finds that the lights on the Matriarch ULTeco5 Slew Loader are good enough to ensure safe working conditions. As with all the moving equipment on the farm, operators work through a daily

checklist prior to starting their shift and the two operators on the Matriarch, one for each shift, do the same. Even though they had operated Bell Cane Loaders before the Slew Loader made its appearance, the training offered by Matriarch has stood them in good stead to fully appreciate the benefits the machine has to offer in terms of speed and efficiencies.

Ralfe adds that excavators fitted with grabs are used to load cane in the area and although their ground pressure is theoretically lower than that of a wheeled loader, he is confident that the Matriarch ULTeco5 Slew Loader has significantly less impact on the field. Ralfe says: “This machine needed no modifications; it was designed to load cane.”

Ralfe is the third generation on the farm Allan Ridge and has been managing the operation for the past 10 years. He also grows mangoes, litchis and citrus. “I should add that we believe in this modern method of sub-surface drip irrigation and are confident that it will increase our yields, especially in sugar,” he says. “Our Bell Tri-wheeled Cane Loader served us well but it had to cross the lines – the Matriarch ULTeco5 Slew Loader does not!”

