

# Lowest cost per tonne productivity has Tomahawk sweet on their UltECO 6

South Africa's picturesque Nkomazi district lies tucked in between the borders of Eswatini, Mozambique and the Kruger National Park and, with its abundance of fertile soils and water, it's a really good place to grow sugar cane and a host of choice fruit and vegetables which are mostly exported.

This is where one finds Tomahawk Farming Operations and the name rings true when one drives onto the estate through lush fruit orchards, as there is no doubt that serious precision farming is a way of life here. Tomahawk Farming Operations produces sugar cane, citrus fruits, pawpaws, litchis, mangoes, bananas, and vegetables such as gem squash and butternut.

The land on which Tomahawk Farming Operations lies was the subject of a successful land claim by the local Matsamo community in 2010. In a groundbreaking effort between the new and former owners, a joint venture has seen a steady process of skills transfer and upliftment taking place to maintain Tomahawk Farming Operations as a successful food producer and exporter, which means sustained job preservation and an earner of foreign exchange. This has been hailed a huge success and an

example of what can be created with total commitment from all concerned.

The farm is one of the largest employers in this area with a full-time labour force of 880 that swells to around 1 500 in the picking season.

This wide valley has produced good quality sugar cane for many decades and, being relatively flat, seems ideal for irrigation. Irrigation water comes mostly from the Lomati River to irrigate the 700ha under sugar cane. Tomahawk Farming Operations has for many years loaded its sugar cane infield using two slew loaders, namely Bell ATL 884 machines. Having the ability to drive infield following the cane stool rows and missing irrigation infrastructure has made the slew loader a sought-after loading tool.

"I haven't been here all that long but I'm aware of the value that the Tomahawk cane production teams saw in the two Bell ATL884s," says André Viljoen, Tomahawk Farming Operations' Workshop Manager. "Sadly, after each ATL884 clocked over 25 000 hours of excellent service, and we'd bought all available spares from Bell Equipment, we've had to cannibalise one machine as a source of spare parts to keep the other one running."



"We enquired from Charles Inggs, Bell Equipment's Product Manager: Forestry and Agriculture, whether it was possible to obtain a similar slew loader and he suggested we look at the more modern Matriarch UltECO 6 machine," André continues. "We were happy to hear that Bell Equipment had another slew loader model available as taking care of the irrigation infrastructure in our cane lands is paramount when loading the cane onto the trucks."

Tomahawk also has a Bell 125 Cane Loader available for emergencies.

When the four-wheel drive Matriarch UltECO 6 Slew Loader arrived, André and the production teams were pleased to see that its working width could be adjusted to fit the row configuration of the Tomahawk cane lands. The operators who had previously worked with the Bell ATL884 machines took to the controls on the Matriarch UltECO 6 seamlessly as the joystick control is simple to use. The operators also enjoy the air-conditioned, ergonomically designed cab that always faces the load and swings through more than 180 degrees.

"When we made our Matriarch UltECO 6 narrower, we fitted a slightly smaller cane grab than the

standard 0,42 metre grab the machine is supplied with," André explains. "The operators enjoy the push piler at the front of the machine as they can now stockpile the cut cane easier, rolling it along before picking it up with the grab."

Despite its all-wheel hydrostatic drive, the Matriarch UltECO 6 Sugarcane Slew Loader is much lighter than the Bell ATL884 and, fitted with high flotation tyres, has much less ground impact.

"The Matriarch UltECO 6 Sugarcane Slew Loader is a highly efficient machine and this can be seen from its fuel consumption which, at 4,2 litres per hour compared to 7,6 litres of that of the Bell ATL884, is a startling improvement of around 44%," André says. "Fuel is obviously an important part of our production costs and this is a huge improvement coupled to the fact that we're achieving high mechanical availabilities during two daily shifts, seven days a week."

"The bottom line for us is that this new Matriarch UltECO 6 Sugarcane Slew Loader is getting the job done with more efficiency due to its slew loading action and lower fuel consumption. This translates into lower production costs per tonne of cane produced – a winning combination."

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*André Viljoen*



**Tomahawk Farming Operations Workshop Manager, André Viljoen (left), with Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen.**

