

Bell forestry partner presents at Focus on Forestry

The key to increased productivity in mechanized forestry harvesting, extraction and processing, lies with the operator of any given machine used for this purpose. Machines have become bigger, smarter and faster in the last 55 years, but it is still the operator who makes the difference.

These are the words of John Deere's Matthew Flood when he gave an eagerly awaited address on the second day of the Focus on Forestry conference held at the Ingwenyama Resort in White River, Mpumalanga in early April.

Matthew, who holds a master's degree in Engineering, is the Product Marketing Manager for John Deere ForestSight in the USA. He had started with the company as a field test engineer on the John Deere M-series Tracked Feller Bunchers and Harvesters. With seven intensive years of experience, he was keen to impart his knowledge and firsthand experience to the more than 300 delegates who attended each day of the three-day event. The theme for this year's event was 'Bridging the technological divide in the African Forestry Sector'.

According to Matthew, major industry changes have occurred from the motor-manual era to the era of mechanization and beyond. As an example, he showed that the width of the grapple on the largest present-day John Deere Skidder matches the length of the first Skidder that John Deere built 55 years ago.

"With our machines getting bigger, smarter and faster, we have vastly increased our productivity but there is upward of a 40% variation between the same size machine in a similar application with different operators. The operator remains the variable. This then leads us to look at technology which needs to be leveraged to assist the operator," he said. "To make machines easier to operate, they must be more precise in the data they collect while the work is being done."

"When the difference between a good and average operator is plotted on a graph, the importance of leveraging technology to raise the standard of the average operator is clearly shown," he said while illustrating this point with a comparative video of how John Deere's trademarked Intelligent Boom Control made a substantial difference in assisting an operator when unloading a timber forwarder.

"Integrating such technology into a business can define how well that business achieves success and how that success can be measured," he added.



(From left) Barend Cilliers, Barend Steenkamp and Johan Visser, all from J&B Timbers in Eswatini, with Simon Shackleton from John Deere.



Brett Hey (left) and Dean Guy (right) from Benchmark Industrial with Anthony Visser (Bell Nelspruit Customer Support Representative).



Abongile Pama and Devan Sternberg from Rance Timbers with Daniel van Huyssteen, Bell Equipment's Sales Representative in the Newcastle area.



Gareth Campbell with Eunice Mkhwanazi and Thandi Mokoena, both from Matsino Business Enterprises in White River.

Matthew touched on John Deere's proven and trademarked operator assistance tools which go a long way in achieving and measuring production goals. "Our TimberManager™ is a cloud-based real-time system and it's connected to another of our software systems namely Timbermatic™ Maps onboard a John Deere machine. It doesn't only provide mapping but also gathers production data which it summarises. It connects to machines in the cloud and TimberManager™ can be synchronised across a total fleet of machines." "Timbermatic™ Maps provides real-time data and job status. Green dots show exactly where a certain volume and species is located in an area, which means that this data can be shown in the cab of a forwarder running behind a harvesting machine. Added to this, a plantation owner sitting in his office can view all this data on a tablet or a smartphone."

Finally, JD Link still provides the core of machine information telematics. It can be used to measure machine efficiencies, collect data and even receive software and firmware upgrades sent from a remote site.

Ashley Bell, Bell Equipment's Product Manager for Forestry and Agricultural Products commented on

the importance for Bell Equipment to attend conferences such as Focus on Forestry: "It's important for us to be at these conferences to stay in touch with what the industry is thinking and to see trends in the industry so that we are able to offer equipment solutions to meet the specific needs of our own client base."

"Contractors come from all over Africa and having so many major contractors and clients present at one gathering is also a good opportunity for us to show the industry what equipment we currently have on offer."

"Our alliance partners in forestry – John Deere, Waratah and Kobelco – play an important role in bringing new technology from the rest of the world. We appreciate the role that they play and work with them, while also developing our own products, to find the ideal product and technology mix for our local industry. And, of course, it presents a good opportunity to network with our existing and potential clients."

On show at the Bell Equipment stand was a new Bell 225F Logger, a Matriarch FASTfell Harvesting Head as well as a Waratah H414 Processing Head.

