



# OVK Bethlehem and Hopetown join dealer network

The mechanisation division of a market-leading player in the retail agricultural space is excited at being appointed as a dealer for Bell Equipment Forestry & Agriculture and JCB Agriculture as it will enhance the mantra of the company being a one-stop shop for its existing and potential new customers.

The Oos-Vrystaat Kaap Operations Limited came into being three decades ago when, in 1993, four farmers' co-operatives in the Eastern Free State amalgamated. These were the co-operatives at Ladybrand, Ficksburg, Clocolan and Albert, and they each had well-established pedigrees going back to between 1919 and 1930 respectively. In 1999, the OVK Koöperasie was converted to a trading company called OVK

Operations Limited with OVK Holdings Limited as its controlling entity.

"Since that time, OVK has shown steady growth to now have 58 retail outlets across the entire Free State and large parts of the Eastern and Northern Cape provinces," says Wimpie Nel, OVK Sales Manager for Whole Goods in the company's Northern Region, based in Bethlehem. "On the

mechanised side, where we sell and maintain tractors and implements, we're split into Northern and Southern regions, with Bethlehem and Clocolan in the North, and Hopetown and Cradock in the South."

Wimpie hails from a family steeped in agriculture as both his grandfather and father had worked for an agricultural co-operative in the Northern Free

State town of Reitz where Wimpie was born and schooled. "I entered the business straight after finishing school and first worked as an assistant in the parts division before moving to other companies focused on agriculture where I gained valuable lessons of parts and service that led me to becoming a salesman," he says. "With equipment sales came exposure to JCB Backhoe Loaders and Loadalls and I could already then sense the value-adding benefits that these types of equipment could have on commercial farms, feedlots and agricultural processing plants."

Wimpie joined OVK in Bethlehem in 2021 and now oversees sales of both mechanical equipment such as tractors, combine harvesters, sprayers, and a host of common and specialised implements. "We sell agricultural tractors with power output up to 670hp that are monsters with all the bells and whistles that modern precision farming demands," he says. "The exposure we get to all types of

farming and material handling equipment is uplifting and sharing this information with clients makes for lasting business relationships that often turn into friendships."

"The same can be said of the information we've already gathered on the JCB Backhoe Loaders and Loadalls that we're positive will add value to our offering as experience has taught us that once a farmer gets to use either a JCB Backhoe Loader or a Loadall they seem to constantly find new and varied uses for the machines, and you'll often hear that they cannot fathom how they had survived without these machines."

We leave Wimpie and his team and scoot due west, crossing the mighty Orange River where it meanders its way past the town of Hopetown.

Hopetown is known historically as the place where the first diamonds were discovered even before Kimberley claimed fame for the

diamond rush. Here we find another important leg of OVK Mechanisation's dealership with Dewald Olivier, OVK Sales Manager for Whole Goods in the company's Northern Cape region, at the helm.

"OVK's presence in this area came into being back in 2004 when the directors of the then Karoo Oranje Landboukoöperasie (KOLK) decided to amalgamate with OVK for strategic reasons to better serve their members, the farmers," Dewald says. "We're proud to say that OVK celebrated 30 years in business in 2023 and that is something to be proud of, and build on."

OVK in Hopetown serves farmers in a wide radius that stretches to Prieska, Kimberley, Barkly-West, Britstown, De Aar, Bloemfontein and Hertzogville plus many smaller villages in-between. The regional office in Hopetown handles the bulk of credit administration and short-term and crop insurance. The Hopetown branch operates a



John Kirsten (left), Manager of the OVK Bethlehem branch, with Wimpie Nel, OVK Sales Manager Whole Goods (North and Eastern regions).



retail division and has three mechanics and one apprentice in its workshop. According to Dewald, 95% of the mechanical servicing and repair is done in the field with only major overhauls being brought into the workshop.

"These days however there is a new gem that sparkles in the area around Hopetown and it's in the shape of a smaller maize kernel that produces popcorn," Dewald explains. "This area is somehow well-suited to growing popcorn and we even have a popcorn factory on the outskirts of the town."

Other crops such as wheat, lucerne, and peas are also cultivated extensively with irrigation from the nearby Orange River.

"As farming practices become increasingly precision-based, more and more mechanisation is creeping into the modern farm and this area is no exception," Dewald says. "That is why we're excited about our appointment as dealers for the Bell Equipment Forestry & Agriculture and JCB Agriculture ranges, as especially the JCB Backhoe Loaders and Loadalls are exactly the types of equipment that seem to slot in seamlessly into busy farming operations."

"Apart from the obvious trenching, backfilling, loading and material handling tasks, these machines almost create work for themselves when farmers build new sheds and warehouses, install irrigation systems and a host of other tasks."

Soon after the company's appointment, Dewald and his team sold a JCB 3DX Pro Backhoe Loader to a local farmer with another mulling whether a JCB 530-70 or the larger JCB 535-95AG Loadall would best suit his purposes.

"We've also been impressed by the attention to detail that Bell Equipment has provided with showing both our mechanics and parts staff how to access online ordering along with some mechanical training," Dewald adds. "Our mechanics and colleagues working in parts are comfortable with the online access to information and training bulletins as we believe we'll be selling more and more of these yellow machines into our area."

