

# JCB Backhoe Loader is a game changer on Gert Coetzee's farm

When Gert Coetzee buys any piece of mechanised equipment for his irrigation farm in the fertile Vaalharts Valley in the Northern Cape his eye is always on the resale value of such a machine, which is why he confidently bought a market leading JCB Backhoe Loader after a good maize crop in 2022.

Gert, his wife, Marelette, and their son, Pieter, farm their land in this unique area on the north-eastern border that the Northern Cape has with the North West Province. Started in the 1930s, the Vaalharts Irrigation Scheme is the largest of its type in the Southern Hemisphere. Water from the Vaal and Harts rivers is channelled along more than 1 000km of concrete-lined canals to 1 280 farms in the area that cover more than 39 000 hectares. Each farm is identified by a block letter or a number.

"My son Pieter will be the third generation of our family to farm this land as my own parents had been here for 50 years before me," Gert Coetzee says. "We grow maize, wheat, ground nuts, soya, some cotton, and lucerne, which is all under irrigation. Our latest plantings are pecan nut trees planted in the corners surrounding our circular lands under pivots."

The Coetzee family currently has 45 hectares under pecan nut trees and plans to systematically plant another 20 hectares.

"While growing pecan nuts has really taken off in the past 30 years, with growing exports since the early 2000s, you may find it interesting that our lucerne is also exported," Gert explains. "It is in high demand in China and

especially in the Middle East where it is used as fodder for horses and camels."

Lucerne from the Vaalharts Valley is harvested between August and May the following year and is baled before being exported. Handling the large bales has always presented a challenge for the Coetzees along with digging irrigation ditches and trenches for irrigation pipes.

"We've long dreamt of how convenient it would be to have our own, new backhoe loader that could handle bales with a fork attachment or dig trenches and backfill them because hiring equipment is expensive and you can never get a machine when the need is at its most urgent," Gert continues. "We were also loathe to buy a used machine as you're never sure what hidden problems you may be buying."

"The price difference between new and used backhoe loaders is very small and to us it made sense to rather look at buying a new machine," says Pieter Coetzee.



(From left): Pieter, Gert, and Marelette Coetzee, with Bell Equipment's Kimberley-based Sales Representative, Eric van der Merwe.

The Coetzee family farm had a good 2022 and a bumper maize crop meant they could shop for a new backhoe loader. "I was taught to always look at the resale value of any machine for when you should want to replace it, and we applied the same principle when looking at the wider backhoe loader market," Gert says. "The first name that stood out for us was that of Bell Equipment and when we learnt that this truly great South African company was now the official distributor of JCB equipment, the plan came together for us due to both Bell Equipment and JCB having such solid reputations and their equipment known for proven resale value."

Bell Equipment's Sales Representative in Kimberley, Eric van der Merwe, assisted the Coetzees with the purchase of their JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader in November 2022.

"As soon as the JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader was delivered to our farm, Pieter cheekily claimed it as 'his' machine," Gert says smiling. Pieter adds: "It's such an easy machine to operate and the controls are smooth and responsive. The fold-over forks work well for when we pick up bulk bags containing fertiliser that weigh up to two tons and crates full of pecan nuts that weigh 500kg, but to load three lucerne bales at once, we're considering getting a larger set of forks made by a third-party supplier."

"It's amazing that when you realise all you've been doing with the machine, you suddenly don't know how you had survived all those years without such a multifunctional tool," Gert says. "You'll appreciate that in the hot Northern Cape sun we like to keep our irrigation pipes buried under the soil and apart from the aforementioned loading applications, trenching and backfilling have been foremost in our uses of the JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader – a true multitasking wonder!"

