

The role of the Oil & Protein Seeds Development Trust and Oilseeds Advisory Committee

By Gerhard Keun, CEO of the Oil & Protein Seeds Development Trust

The Oil & Protein Seeds Development Trust (OPDT) and Oilseeds Advisory Committee (OAC) were founded in 1997 in terms of the provisions of the *Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, 1996* (Act 47 of 1996, as amended), following the dissolution of the former Oilseeds Board. In addition, the Groundnuts, Soya Beans and Sunflower Forums were established as part of these structures.

The OPDT and OAC objectives are set out in a trust deed and constitution respectively. Since 1997, all actions have been based on the objectives in the said documents.

In summarising the authority of the mentioned bodies, one may argue that the OPDT manages funding, the OAC manages research projects and that the above-mentioned forums create a platform for discussing matters of common interest in terms of the industries involved.

Funding of canola research

Since the establishment of these structures, sunflower, soya beans and groundnuts have comprised the oil seeds crops defined in the OPDT trust deed. Following requests from the industry, the OPDT trust deed was amended in 2013 to include the funding of canola research.

The OPDT and OAC did not always function in favourable circumstances. During the course of action, the commodity trusts were threatened with the alienation of funds, and a negative image had been created in respect of the work, particularly transformation work, performed by these trusts.

Despite these conditions, they have strived to achieve their objectives. Since 1997, an amount of R121 911 510 has been devoted to research relating to

sunflower, soya beans, groundnuts and canola by the OPDT. This includes funding of transformation projects amounting to R29 455 309.

Since the establishment of the bursary scheme in 2007, grants to the value of R2 820 000 have been awarded to deserving MSc and PhD students. The research has included the funding of various research projects in respect of the two fastest-growing commodities, namely soya beans and canola, in South African agriculture.

Stimulating stagnant industries

A key contribution to especially soya food research has also been made. Value chain studies in respect of sunflower and groundnuts have been funded in an effort to stimulate the stagnant sunflower and declining groundnut industries.

The role of an agricultural industry trust is to act as a catalyst to agricultural transformation.

Transformation has played an increasingly significant role, and in 2014 the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) introduced the *Generic Transformation Guidelines*. Some of the trusts remain subject to statutory levies. The guidelines determine that at least 20% of the collected statutory income from levies should be allocated to activities that are in line with the NAMC transformation guidelines. Since the OPDT is not subject to statutory levies, it was decided to apply these guidelines to transformation projects relating to oilseeds crops.

During a workshop in March 2016,

the minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, Senzeni Zokwana, provided clarity regarding the role of the trusts, stating that "the role of an agricultural industry trust is to act as a catalyst to agricultural transformation".

There are numerous challenges for the OPDT and OAC to overcome, not only in terms of transformation but also in terms of technology transfer and research in the interests of the total oilseeds industry. OPDT and OAC have always found a balance between transformation as defined by the NAMC, general research, information and promotion activities.

Soya food programme

Through the years co-operation has been sought with government departments and currently negotiations are underway with the Department of Science and Technology (DST) to obtain supplementary funding for a joint soya food programme which complies with transformation requirements.

With the co-operation of the Maize Trust, Winter Cereal Trust (WCT) and Sorghum Trust, the OAC and OPDT are also negotiating to take over the Grain Farmer Development Association (GFADA). The objective of these negotiations is to improve the management and co-ordination of transformation projects, as well as to eliminate duplication. Negotiations will also result in stretching the research rand through co-operation.

Interesting and challenging times await us. The OPDT and OAC will continue to position themselves to ensure a relevant contribution to the benefit of the oilseeds industry.

For more information, contact the offices of the oilseeds industry on 011 234 3400/1 or visit www.opot.co.za.