



Sharing Soil Health Principles on an International Scale Between the North Dakota-NRCS and the Elandslaagte Study Group, South Africa

by Jay Fuhrer, Soil Health Specialist, ND NRCS

It all started in 2014 with an email from a South African study group, inquiring about a proposed visit to the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District's Menoken Farm. The Elandslaagte Study Group is holistic minded, with a goal of farming with nature and a lifelong learning culture. Their membership is diverse and actively applies soil health principles to the landscape. It consists of:

- 40% grass based dairy farmers. Using grazing pivots seeded to a combination of perennials and annual cover crop combinations.
- 40% cattle ranchers. Using high stock density grazing systems, with frequent moves to fresh paddocks. These are systems with short grazing exposure periods and long recovery periods.
- 20% cropland farmers. Planting primarily corn & soybean, and now introducing cover crop combinations with livestock in the off season.

The Chair was Ian Riddell, a rancher and holistic educator who operates near Lady Smith, province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Arrangements were soon made for a dozen of its members to fly into Bismarck, ND. Accompanying the group was Dr. Christine Jones, a world renowned soil ecologist and soil health advocate from Australia.

Over the next two days the group visited the Menoken Farm and a few additional local farms; reviewing the carbon cycle, water cycle, nutrient management, infiltration, soil function, plant diversity, cover crop combinations, livestock integration, and quality of life. A soil health discussion and exchange of information evolved out of the two day period, resulting in a strong international connection.

Sometime later an invitation was received by ND NRCS State Conservationist Mary Podoll, requesting Soil Health Specialist Jay Fuhrer to visit their group in South Africa. The visit occurred in April of 2016, and centered around the presentation of the soil health principles. The goal was to complete five on the ground workshops in different locations with the farming community, plus a closing conference. The following schedule was arranged and completed:

- Workshop 1 – Richard Cole farm near Durban, SA
- Workshop 2 – Miles March and Simon Green farms near Nottingham Road, SA
- Workshop 3 – Brad Gace and Ross Stockil farms near Bergville, SA
- Workshop 4 – Darryl Twiddy, Andrew Simpson & Joel Reeve farms near Estcourt, SA
- Workshop 5 – Ian Riddell and Craig & Adele Slater near Ladysmith, SA
- Closing Conference – Winterton, SA

Benefits included the exchange of information regarding the carbon cycle, plant diversity, cropping systems, grazing systems, dairy herd nutrition, beef cow nutrition, and soil function. Information gained by NRCS will be shared with North Dakota clients and beyond. In addition, a number of tweets were completed while in South Africa, and may be viewed at [NRCS_Ndakota](#).



Coetzee Ranch case study. De Wet and Heleen Coetzee with Kathy and Jay Fuhrer

Miles March and Simon Green farms near Nottingham Road, SA

