

AFGRI leverages technology to help local farmers build a sustainable future

There's a misconception that the agriculture industry is behind the curve when it comes to technology adoption. In fact, the opposite is true, although unfortunately often at the expense of the individual farmer.

So said Pierre Durand, Head of IT and Innovation at agricultural services company AFGRI Agri Services (AFGRI), in conversation with Datacentrix CEO, Ahmed Mahomed. Durand explained that when it comes to technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) devices, they're only as good as the connected infrastructure that underpins them.

“The truth is that unless you have a way to actually use that data being gathered by your drone – showing for instance those pieces of land that need specific assistance in crop growing or additional water requirements – it's difficult to understand how exactly you can increase yield significantly.

“What we've seen with many of the leading-edge farms is that they have self-created platforms to get the connectivity right,” he continued. “They have been using varying

combinations of 3G, fibre and copper, and, particularly in outlying areas, many farmers have put this infrastructure down themselves.”

Bringing economies of scale to local agri
Said Jacob de Villiers, Financial Executive at AFGRI Group Holdings: “Modernisation is



**Pierre Durand, Head of IT and Innovation
at AFGRI Agri Services**

probably the conversation we have the most frequently with our customer base. Technology in the form of agricultural equipment has come on in leaps and bounds, and is the leading driver of crop production.

“Our farmers' ability to innovate and use technology is often underestimated, and so, as a 98-year-old organisation, AFGRI is continuously striving to be at the cutting edge of innovation to help our clients ensure sustainable business into the future.”

AFGRI has taken on the role of integrator, assisting the local agri sector to find these critical technologies and pull them together in a meaningful way while leveraging economies of scale, Durand explained.

“For a single farmer to put down the proper infrastructure is an expensive exercise. But, with a co-operative approach, a packaged solution can provide economies of scale, bringing the cost down to a place where it makes sense for our clients.”

As such, the organisation has made significant investments to extend its support to the industry. There are many examples, such as the revamping of AFGRI's siloes for faster offload speeds, as well as the updating of its stock monitoring systems, ensuring that there is a constant view of stock and its movements through the siloes. Then, there are also the softer issues, such as the company's online platform, which allows easier transacting for its farmers.

“Our smaller farmers need practical solutions, and another example of how AFGRI has stepped in to help unlock this value is with the introduction of Axl in 2020,” Durand added. Axl is AFGRI's online platform designed for the convenient rental of farm equipment, facilitating the contract between the renter and the owner in a few simple steps online. “Every farmer is sitting with under-utilised equipment that stands idle between seasons,” he stated. “Axl provides a platform for the farmer to rent out



AFGRI is leveraging Datacentrix's holistic Hybrid IT value proposition, optimising workloads by migrating to Datacentrix cloud services to boost performance and improve cost management.

equipment during downtime to produce another source of revenue for the farm. The platform takes the risk away from both sides.”

Fostering a partnership approach

“It is clear that for an organisation like AFGRI, connectedness throughout the business is vitally important. “Our value chain has become very interesting, and from a client's point of view, AFGRI wants to avoid the frustration that can come from dealing with a large corporate,” Durand continued. “In line with this, we're increasingly seeing a theme of partnership



Video

Datacentrix CEO, Ahmed Mahomed talks to Jacob de Villiers, Financial Executive at AFGRI Group Holdings and Pierre Durand, Head of IT and Innovation at AFGRI Agri Services about the role of technology in modernising the sector.

Watch now >>



Looking at it from this perspective, as a technology partner, Datacentrix's approach is to partner with its clients to solve business challenges by leveraging technology to deliver real business value.

emerge, where our clients are treated as true partners. By the same token, AFGRI itself needs its own strong partners, and we've found this in Datacentrix. By working with Datacentrix, we are able to provide our clients with a holistic solution, one that includes the underlying technology infrastructure.

“An element of true partnership is understanding where your clients want to go, and even more importantly, particularly in the face of the current pandemic, remaining flexible enough to shift with the changing business as needed,” he added.

“This is how AFGRI operates, and the fact that Datacentrix is willing to take the journey with us has been reinforced over and over during our time with them. The relationship we have with Datacentrix is extremely honest and transparent.”

Technology to deliver agri business results AFGRI's investment in innovation extends to executing on its digital transformation strategy. Last year, the organisation kick-started a three-year project with Datacentrix, which encompasses the rollout of a software-defined networking solution, cloud-delivered security, endpoint visibility with the software-defined WAN rollout, monitoring, connectivity delivery

through Datacentrix company, eNetworks, an ISP and network specialist, and more.

“Roughly one year down, the bulk of the transitional work for AFGRI has been completed,” commented Ahmed Mahomed, CEO at Datacentrix. “AFGRI is leveraging Datacentrix's holistic Hybrid IT value proposition, optimising workloads by migrating to Datacentrix cloud services to boost performance and improve cost management. The most important reason behind this, is the positive impact it will have on AFGRI's ability to continue delivering value to local farmers.

“Farming is core to any country when it comes to sustain-ability, and modernisation is critical to safeguarding this asset. Technology plays a massive role in ensuring that you get the best yield from a piece of land and achieving the planned outcome. Looking at it from this perspective, as a technology partner, Datacentrix's approach is to partner with its clients to solve business challenges by leveraging technology to deliver real business value.”

Said De Villiers: “In South Africa currently, we're at a watershed moment. As a country we're fortunately still food secure, but we need to understand that population growth will put pressure on our ability to look after our people. Logistical constraints also hamper our own affordability of food, if we can't ensure that we produce locally at a better price than importing.

“AFGRI takes its role in delivering the best services at the best cost to our customers very seriously, with the aim of profitable, sustainable farming. Through our partnerships with companies like Datacentrix, we will continue to help our farmer base to solve their problems, providing a solid foundation to really deliver sustainable value,” he concluded.