

■ WINNER

Eshowe farmer 'source of wisdom' for neighbours

NKULULEKO NENE

SIMON D'Aubrey has become a beacon of hope for small-scale farmers in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Despite the tension that often exists between white and black farmers, D'Aubrey has bridged the gap by sharing his expertise and resources with emerging farmers.

The owner of Arcadia Estate in Eshowe, north of Durban, D'Aubrey, 38, who was recently named KZN Agricultural Union (Kwanalu) Young Farmer of the Year, will compete against his counterparts from the rest of the country for the national title, to be held in Pretoria next month.

Speaking to the Sunday Tribune, he said he had dedicated his award to small-scale farmers who had no formal skills in agriculture but were willing to learn.

D'Aubrey, who is also a vice chairperson of Eshowe/Entumeni farmers association, holds a degree in property development and another in agriculture. He took to farming when he quit his job at a construction company.

He said he decided to help locals when he realised they had challenges in producing quality crops and also sending their harvest to the Matikulu mill.

"They do not have modes of transport so I have to delay taking my harvest to the mill until theirs is ready. I also assist them with water from the borehole to irrigate their crops.

"They call me anytime of the day when they are stuck. If someone's

the person to have a chat about it, then we sort things out," he said.

D'Aubrey said, generally, farmers were willing to help others but needed to make the time.

"Farming requires many hours of hard work. Commercial farmers do not have the time to groom others."

D'Aubrey, who also plants timber on a small scale, wants to include farming avocado and hemp in the near future.

Thandazile Nyandeni, a farmer who was helped by D'Aubrey, said she appreciated him for helping them with haulage, and tools to cut cane. She said the "white farmer" visited every farm to monitor each crop.

"His farming skills have spurred us on to achieve good crops. There has been a time when we felt so discouraged and wanted to get out of farming but with his help we have persevered," she said.

John Langa, another emerging farmer, said D'Aubrey gave them certified seeds which yielded quality crops. He said before their cane was of poor quality.

"When I have a challenge he is the first person on my mind. He is very reliable and honest about the information he provides us. He is a source of wisdom," Langa said.

The chief executive of Kwanalu, Sandy La Marque during a competition held at Pietermaritzburg Royal Show ground last Thursday, said it was exciting to see young farmers who want to make a difference. "We have no doubt Simon will fly the flag for us in the



SUGAR cane farmer Simon D'Aubrey with small-scale farmers Thandazile Nyandeni, John Langa, Thamsanqa Yandeni and John Gumede on his Arcadia farm in Eshowe. | MOTSWARI MOFOKENG ANA