



NEWSLETTER



Growing Grasslands

Page 2

**Training
Spotlight**

Page 3

**Carbon Series
Part 1**

Page 4

**Eco-Ranger
Feedback**

Page 7



Growing Grasslands, Growing Livelihoods:

GRASS Programme Expansion in 2025

The year 2025 has been a landmark one for Meat Naturally Africa's Grassland Restoration and Stewardship in South Africa (GRASS) Programme. Through the dedication of communal farmers, strong local institutions, and committed partners, the programme has expanded at an unprecedented scale—strengthening climate resilience, restoring rangelands, and unlocking new opportunities for rural livelihoods.

A Year of Remarkable Growth

In 2025, 54 new farmer associations joined the GRASS Programme, collectively adding 185,383 hectares of land under improved grazing and fire management. Notably, 73% of this area is natural rangeland, underscoring the programme's focus on protecting and restoring ecologically valuable landscapes while supporting livestock-based livelihoods.

This growth brings the GRASS Programme to a total of 180 participating communities, involving an estimated 10,000 farmers. Together, these communities are now managing over 580,000 hectares under practices aligned with rangeland restoration, climate mitigation, and long-term productivity.

Landscape-Scale Impact

The scale of the GRASS Programme now represents nearly 10% of all former homeland areas in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. This is a powerful achievement—demonstrating what is possible when communal farmers are supported with the right technical guidance, governance structures, and access to innovative financing mechanisms such as carbon markets.

Across these landscapes, improved grazing planning and coordinated fire management are already contributing to healthier grasslands, reduced land degradation risk, and more resilient livestock systems. Just as importantly, the programme is strengthening collective action and farmer leadership at community level—laying the foundation for lasting social and environmental impact.

Gratitude to Our Partners

We are immensely proud of this achievement and deeply grateful to TASC and its partners for enabling the continued growth of the GRASS Programme in 2025. Your support has been instrumental in helping communities scale their impact and demonstrate that rangeland restoration and rural development go hand in hand.

Season's Greetings

As we close out the year, we would like to extend our warmest season's greetings to all our farmers, partners, supporters, and collaborators. Thank you for being part of this journey with us. We look forward to building on this momentum in 2026 as we continue restoring grasslands, strengthening livelihoods, and shaping a more resilient future for South Africa's communal rangelands.

With gratitude and best wishes from the Meat Naturally Africa team

Eco-Rangers' Numbers Grow, Farmers Get New Energy, and Knowledge Deepens

This year marked a major leap forward in strengthening rangeland stewardship, livestock management skills, and community partnerships across our training programmes. A total of 41 new trainees completed the Foundations Course in June, followed by 184 trainees completing the course in October, bringing us to 225 Eco-Ranger trainees, the highest number ever achieved in a single year. This record-breaking milestone reflects the dedication of our teams, the enthusiasm of trainees, and the growing importance of locally rooted environmental leadership.



A standout highlight has been the significant rise in female and youth trainee participation. Their presence continues to bring fresh energy to the programme. This diversity strengthens both the learning environment and our ability to support farmers effectively. To deepen practical field skills, this year's training programmes expanded the livestock production section, adding essential topics such as body condition scoring, age classification using dentition, and the link between grazing patterns and tick control. These additions gave Eco-Rangers sharper tools to

guide farmers in improving herd health, planning grazing rotations, and identifying early signs of stress or disease. For the first time, all new Eco-Rangers also completed knowledge assessments, helping us benchmark understanding and tailor support throughout the year.

This momentum extended beyond Eco-Ranger training into community development initiatives. A recent two-day goat-farming workshop delivered by the Department of Agriculture proved to be a significant win for the Nswalakahle Association in the KZN landscape. Eco-Rangers and association members eagerly attended to deepen their small-livestock knowledge. Participants left the workshop inspired and ready to apply their learning. "We learned practical skills in breed selection, herd health, and integrating goats with our rangeland restoration work," shared one Eco-Ranger. The Tribal Authority Committee echoed this enthusiasm, noting that having young people gain technical livestock knowledge strengthens both households and the broader community.



The success of the goat training workshop not only boosted the skills of Eco-Rangers but also strengthened partnerships with the Department of Agriculture and neighbouring farmer groups. As we close out the year, these achievements highlight the growing capacity, resilience, and commitment within our programme and the communities we serve. With stronger partnerships, improved training systems, and a new generation of skilled Eco-Rangers, we are well positioned for an impactful year ahead.

The confounding complexity of a simple story

In December, in a series of workshops with our field teams we wanted to dig deeper into the complexities of the “carbon” story and to understand how we can best communicate concepts that seem confoundingly complex yet can be quite simple. This seems like a contradiction: how can a simple story be so complex? Contradiction can cause discomfort, and discomfort creates conflict. Throughout this story, questions are raised that require us to navigate this discomfort and to consider multiple perspectives.

A clear example of the importance of perspective is in the central threat within the carbon story: climate change. There is a common perception that climate change is too theoretical or esoteric a topic for people to grasp without sufficient technical background. From the perspective of climate scientists, policy-makers, and academics, this is not an unreasonable perception. To understand the details of climate change and the challenges of preventing climate breakdown, it is necessary to understand atmospheric chemistry, economic history, and global geopolitics. On the other hand, I’ve been amazed at how easily people understand the principles of climate change when it is grounded in lived experience. A farmer doesn’t need to understand atmospheric chemistry to perceive that there has been an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather, such as droughts, floods, and storms. The urgency and severity of the crisis don’t require complicated graphs and projections to be understood; it is already being experienced. Perspective and personal experience, in this sense, are much more valuable than complex theory.

People understand the principles of climate change when it is grounded in lived experience.

Throughout our discussions on the carbon story, several simple concepts emerged that cut through the complexity of carbon:

1. **Carbon is Natural:** It is the building block that makes up most living things; it can be found in plants and animals, in the air, and in the soil.
2. **The Problem:** Industrial countries and big companies have been digging up “ancient carbon” (fossil fuels like coal and oil) and burning it for energy, adding massive amounts of carbon to the air.
3. **The Result:** Too much carbon in the air traps heat, causing climate change and intense weather events.
4. **The Solution:** We have agreed as a global society on two priorities:
 - a. We must stop causing climate change, and
 - b. We must help people cope with its impacts.

Crucially, we have delayed so much in taking action that we can’t just stop burning fossil fuels; we also need to *remove* carbon from the air. This is where our work becomes vital: *Rangeland restoration is a great strategy to address both of these priorities.*

By implementing the activities in their Rangeland Stewardship Agreements, such as regenerative grazing practices and wildfire management, communities restore their land. Restored rangelands remove carbon from the air and store it in the soil. Simultaneously, healthy rangelands support healthy livestock and livelihoods, helping communities buffer the impacts of climate change like drought and floods.

Effective restoration, however, requires long-term investment. If rangeland restoration is an effective strategy to tackle climate change, then those causing the problem should be the ones paying for the solution. The carbon market allows us to verify carbon removals and to get carbon polluters to pay.

To make this work, we rely on rigour and trust. We use international standards, detailed modelling, and independent, third-party audits to ensure every carbon credit represents real carbon removals. Just as importantly, we ensure the benefits are fair. Through our carbon revenue benefit-sharing mechanism, the community's share of revenue increases over time, starting before the investors have even recovered their funds, ensuring that the people doing the work on the ground are the primary beneficiaries.

While the "simple story" explains *why* restoration matters, the complexity often lies in *how* the system works, particularly regarding financial returns. A common source of confusion, for example, is how carbon revenues are calculated.

The total amount of revenue is determined by the effectiveness of the restoration and the rigour with which we can demonstrate these outcomes. Auditors can only verify what we can demonstrate, so revenue generation depends on the evidence provided to demonstrate restoration actions. This is critical to ensuring trust in the system: if there is no evidence, then for the purpose of the audit, it is as if it did not happen.

If we can maintain trust in the rigour, integrity, and effectiveness of our work, then carbon credits can facilitate long-term, multi-generational sustainability of restored rangeland. There is a lot of complexity in the details of how carbon credits are generated and how effectively these credits accelerate climate action. The simplicity of the story, however, is as important as its complexity and must not be lost.



Smart Waste Solutions for Rural Residents and Rangelands

Disposable diapers contaminate freshwater sources and rangelands while simultaneously burdening struggling household budgets. The cost of disposable nappies for one child over 2½ years is almost R12,000, the cost of a good breeding cow!

ERS, a local implementing partner NGO based in Matatiele, co-designed and piloted a "smart nappy" system to mainstream affordable, improved cloth and alternatives.

As a result, 160 participating families are saving 15% of their monthly income for better spending, such as food security. This intervention resulted in 100,000 less diapers being discarded into the landscape annually, improving rangeland and freshwater health. We aim to reach at least another 1000 families next year.

Luyolo Nonkevu, a father and livestock owner, saved over R600 per month after switching to smart cloth nappies. His advocacy for clean rangelands was inspired when one of his cows died after swallowing plastic at an informal nappy dump.



Activities in KwaZulu-Natal

A Day of Unity and Excellence

The UMdavavana Grazing Association recently demonstrated exceptional teamwork and dedication during a highly successful cattle branding exercise. In just one day, the association managed to brand 52 cattle, showcasing not only their commitment to proper livestock management but also the strong unity that defines their work.

The branding process was carried out with remarkable precision and cleanliness. After being provided guidance on the correct branding methods, the team embraced the instructions wholeheartedly and executed the task with professionalism and care. Their willingness to learn and their ability to work together efficiently made the day a true success.



Auction Preparation and Community Strength

The Hlungulwane farmers recently demonstrated outstanding commitment and organisation as they prepared for their upcoming cattle auction. Working together, the farmers collected more than 75 cattle for the event and ensured that all animals were properly branded in preparation for market requirements.

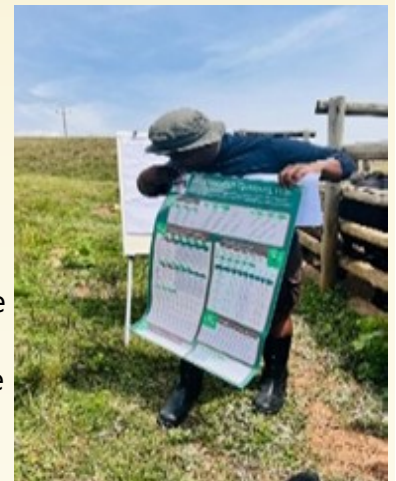
As Meat Naturally and Afrivet, we supported the farmers by conducting market readiness checks, ensuring that each animal met the standards expected for auction. This entire process was carried out in close partnership with the Department of Agriculture, especially because the area falls within the FMD (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) zone, where strict compliance and monitoring are required.

Unfortunately, just as preparations were nearing completion, an FMD outbreak occurred in the region. For the safety of livestock and in adherence to animal health regulations, the scheduled auction had to be postponed. While this was a setback, the unity and hard work shown by the farmers remain a major success.

Market Activity

Market readiness workshops, both classroom and practical sessions, have increased interest in farmers to participate at the auctions. Posters detailing why auctions are important and how MNA works have assisted in spreading information within the association and also helped educate those who were not able to attend workshops.

All efforts from Market readiness have yielded a successful auction at Bergville (Wild trust sites and MNA sites). The auction was a success because the cattle brought into the sale were satisfactory to the buyers and the income received by the sellers was satisfactory. The potential turnover of the 98 cattle that were sold was a million rand. Only 9 animals were not sold. Farmers are willing to host another auction with MnA early next year.



Feedback from the Eco-Rangers

"We came here to learn about the land, but we also discovered ourselves. This training opened my eyes to how much we can do to restore our land. I feel proud to be part of the change," said one of the KZN South Eco-Rangers.

Another Eco-Ranger shared, "We are not just learning – we are transforming our communities. I now see the land differently and know how to care for it better"—Ecoranger from Qwaqwa.

"The Eco Ranger training provided comprehensive insights into regenerative farming practices, animal health management, and sustainable land use. The interactive sessions and hands-on activities helped me understand the importance of ecosystem conservation and livestock management. The trainers were knowledgeable and supportive, making the learning experience engaging and enjoyable. I am confident that the skills and knowledge gained will help me support farmers and promote sustainable agriculture practices. Well done, Meat Naturally." —Nomusa nkosi Gwebu association



"Sawbona, Igama u Mpilenhle Zondo Emangwaneni in Bergville, I training yahamba kahle kakhulu sathola ulwazi olusha, safunda nokuthi u Meat natural is a business company elisebenzisana nabafuyi ngokubambisana kokongiwa kwamadlelo. Safunda nokuthi ama ecoranger abaqaphi bemvelo emadlelweni nayo yonke into esedlelweni ,nemsebenzi eyenziwa ama Eco-Rangers: ukusiza abafuyi ukuhlela indlela abazodlisa ngayo, Nanokuthi kubalulekile ukuthi as ama ecoranger si attend yonke imhlangano nabafuyi I training isilekelele kakhulu sathola nezindlela zokugwema izifo emfuyweni nanokuthi kumele singawashisi amadlelo.



Nanokuthi I purpose ka Meat Naturally ukuthi abafuyi bakwazi ukuzibambela ngokwabo namhla u meat naturally usuhoxile. I training isilekelele kakhulu sathola ulwazi saludlulisela emphakathini yethu ukuze sithuthukise umphakathi wethu, Ngyabonga"

"Njn cc I Training yahambakahle kakhulu safunda kwasicacela uku shintshanisa amadlelo, uku lapha imfuyo ezifeni ukungashisi amadlelo nokubamba imihlangano nabafuyi loku esakufunda kuyasilekelele kakhulu kumphakathi esikuwo safunda nanga ma Alien plant ukuthi ayingozi kangakanani la e South Africa ayingozi kakhulu e.g. memileduze kwamanzi ayawaqeda amanzi ngyabonga Thando Mbhele."

Livestock branding initiative report

Meat Naturally has been collaborating with communal farmers in the Kruger to Canyons (K2C) landscape to implement livestock branding initiatives. In South Africa, branding is a critical practice that ensures permanent ownership, reduces theft, improves herd management, and guarantees compliance with livestock regulations.

Farmer awareness and commitment and achievements (August – November 2025)

Farmers are increasingly committed to branding their livestock as they now fully understand its importance—not only for legal compliance but also as a key measure to prevent theft. From August to November 2025, the Meat Naturally Kruger (MNK) team, in partnership with Conservation South Africa (CSA), successfully assisted five villages with branding activities. During this period, 1,140 cattle



were branded, benefiting approximately 165 farmers.

In partnership with DARDLEA

In November 2025, the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA) joined the initiative to facilitate foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) branding. This process involves hot-branding cattle with the letter 'F', indicating that the animal has been vaccinated against FMD. This additional step strengthens disease control and enhances livestock health management in communal farming systems.

Help Provide Nutrition Security



To combat malnutrition in South Africa, you can partner with Meat Naturally. For just R1000, you can supplement 150 children's meals with high-quality, sustainably sourced beef. Your donation to Meat Naturally Kruger supports local farmers who practice regenerative agriculture, keeps money circulating within the community, and helps fight food insecurity.

Donate by emailing Meat Naturally's Ayanda Mhlonyane at ayanda.mhlonyane@meatnaturallyafrica.com or sending a Whatsapp/calling +27 078 9932596.