

# Tragic plight of domestic animals in small-town townships countrywide

Anton Ferreira

THE HEART-wrenching case of Warrior, the stray dog that miraculously survived being buried alive at a Khayelitsha school, has focused attention on the plight of domestic animals in Cape Town's townships.

As bad as the problem is in the city, this is only the tip of the iceberg: the same story of uncontrolled breeding, starvation, abuse and suffering is repeated in almost every town and village of the Western Cape, and probably South Africa.

The neglected dogs and cats of dorps like Swellendam, Darling, Springbok, Pofadder – you name them – are in just as much need of help as those in the Cape Flats. Only trouble is, the media spotlight seldom shines on them.

Take Clanwilliam, that delightful Cederberg town 240km north of

Cape Town on the N7. Renowned as the heart of the rooibos tea industry, most of us think of it as a place that has a great dam for fishing and waterskiing; a quaint hamlet surrounded in spring by spectacular wild flowers, and a wildly popular destination for initiates in the new sport of bouldering.

But venture into Hopland – the local name for the RDP housing tract – and the picture is far more grim. The people who live here, and in the adjacent shack settlement, barely have enough money to feed themselves, let alone their dogs.

It's a community devastated by alcoholism, teen pregnancies and random violence.

But the humans do at least have recourse to welfare grants and a clinic; the dogs have nothing. Their skin is raw and scarred by mange, their ribs protrude, they tremble

with the symptoms of distemper; they skulk away in corners to avoid being stoned by bored kids.

Groups like the SPCA do not operate here, and the nearest vet is 90km away in Vredendal.

A handful of local animal-lovers formed the Clanwilliam Animal Welfare Society (Claws) some years ago to try to make a difference, but they face an uphill battle on a shoestring budget.

They rely entirely on donations or fund-raising efforts like jumble sales and raffles. They provide cheap mange treatments and, with the support of the local Freemasons lodge which allows the rent-free use of its property, make it possible for a vet to visit the town once a month.

Perhaps their most significant achievement is to have raised enough money to spay or neuter 400 cats and dogs in the space of a year.

The operations are performed in a makeshift surgery by vets who are reluctant to be identified because they might get into trouble with the Veterinary Council.

How perverse is that? Dedicated professionals who are willing to provide an essential service to the indigent at an affordable price have to operate in near-secrecy. The council, they fear, would take them to task for operating on kitchen tables, because a town like Clanwilliam has no proper sterile surgical facilities for animals. But if these vets did not provide this service, who would?

It's impossible to neuter every animal, of course, and for every 400 that are done there's another 400 waiting. Earlier this year, a destitute Hopland resident came to Claws to ask for food for his dogs, who he said he could not afford to feed. When Claws members went to the man's

**If bureaucrats can find a way to obstruct animal aid groups... they will**

home, a squalid hovel near the abattoir; they found 30 dogs on the premises, all in pitiful condition, filthy, inbred and sick.

Claws called the police and municipal officials, who said all the dogs should be put down. So the Claws members collected the animals – 21 of them puppies – and took them to be put down. At their own expense, naturally.

The man concerned still has an unsprung bitch, which is still pro-

ducing litter after litter of puppies.

You might think the municipality or province would chip in to help; after all, Claws is doing their dirty work for them by reducing the number of diseased dogs that pose potential health risks to humans. But no. A previous DA-led municipal administration did contribute R5 000 last year, but obtaining the money was like squeezing blood from a stone.

And if bureaucrats in Pretoria can find an obstacle to place in the path of organisations like Claws, they will.

Claws has applied four times for NPO status, which would make it easier to raise funds, and has been rejected each time. Once a functionary with minimal numeracy skills sent back the application because he said only six of the seven office-bearers were named.

When his mistake was politely

pointed out, with the figures one through seven helpfully listed next to the seven names, he rejected the application again because two of the office-bearers had the same surname and appeared to be related. This, he alleged, was not allowed.

So it's not easy to run an animal welfare group in a town like Clanwilliam. The same story is no doubt being played out in countless other towns.

Inevitably, the one or two committed people who dedicate themselves to helping township animals eventually burn out under the stress. There are too many animals to help, too much suffering to witness, and not enough help. Sometimes there is another volunteer ready to take over; sometimes not.

● A former Reuters correspondent, Ferreira is now a freelance journalist based in Clanwilliam.

## A GENTLE REVOLUTION

# Family farming vs the killer foods

Rob Small

IT'S NOT scientific. It cannot feed the world. The pests will destroy it.

That's what I heard from the "experts" when I joined the work to revive family farming in South Africa, in Soweto in the early 1980s.

The neo-liberals say that ambition and greed are the driving force behind progress, harnessed for the good by competitive debt-capital that generates trickledown to feed the world. But this is no longer true, if it ever was.

Firstly, the debt-driven economy is shedding more jobs than it creates, despite often healthy gross domestic product. This is not changing. Secondly, there is a fundamental insight without which no new way is possible: people at heart are NOT greedy and competitive. Original economic impulses are actually driven by a desire for the good (the source of ethics), not greed. Otherwise there would be no loved children and caring families, no kindness or giving. The desire to develop culture drives us, not survival.

With ethical leadership, and very modest all-round assistance – at a cost of no more than R100 per micro-farmer per month – it is now possible to produce hundreds, thousands, millions, of food-secure households, and thousands of self-help jobs worth R1 000-R3 000 a month, after costs. All on pieces of wasteland no bigger than a classroom, 100m<sup>2</sup> – or five classrooms, 500m<sup>2</sup>.

Everyone needs to eat. All modern human culture grows around food consumption and production for the good of all. Agri-Culture.

There are about five million taxpayers in South Africa with regular incomes. They mostly buy cold-chain food, gassed-for-longevity, agri-poisoned and increasingly infected with genetically modified material. This killer food, more often than not, has been transported over hundreds, even thousands, of kilometres, at huge energy and climate change cost, to supermarkets.

What if we offer the same taxpayers the chance to collect international quality, un-poisoned, same-

day harvested, super-fresh and healthy seasonal food at a good price? And what if we show that, along with ensuring unlimited sustainable jobs for local family farmers, this purchase directly enables community-based nature conservation and climate change mitigation, while diminishing individual carbon footprint by at least 50 percent?

This is possible because family farming is just as productive as, and 250 percent more energy efficient than, agri-industrial food systems, which actually cause over 40 percent of carbon pollution. A recent 30-year study by the Rodale Institute, among other studies, proves this.

Agri-Culture, for the good of all, will surely get easier to sell as time goes on because "the markets" (that is human beings) largely want to get off the stupid and destructive path we are currently on.

So, how is it done? It's not all that complicated in practice.

Buy all your fresh food from local family farmers. Invest directly in local family farmers and pay them a fair price. The super fresh produce makes you jump for joy, and they get enough cash to develop and send their kids to school. The "middle-men", like the for-max-profit "food futures" traders who drive the new food-war economy, by dictating via investments who eats and who does not, are smart and well-resourced enough to adjust and find other things to sell.

The problem is that family farmers are few in South Africa. Family farmers are not widely honoured and don't get access to finance and support the way big agri-industry farmers do. They can't grow huge market volumes alone and cannot easily sustain all the work to create and supply a market.

This is where the all-important "new secret ingredient" changes the "failure game": a modest and sustained subsidised support package (R100 per month per family farmer), supplied by honest agencies, that enable family farmers to access bulk farming inputs cheaply, get training, advice and mentorship according to their level of farming development, obtain monitoring and assessment



EARNER: Super fresh produce from family farms is healthy and farmers get enough cash to send their children to school, says the writer.



assistance, and obtain guaranteed access to fair-pay (short value chain) neighbourhood markets via a local pack-shed, or farmers market.

A Universal Income Grant would help too.

I hear someone ask – "subsidy"? "Universal Income Grant"? Surely this is unsustainable?"

But this objection is blind. Remember that the world banking system has been subsidised to the tune of trillions, with more to come. Remember that American, EU and

Chinese agri-business is subsidised in billions of dollars and euros, though many of their farmers are in debt to their eyeballs. All that cheap imported food in our supermarkets comes from somewhere.

One of South Africa's best exports are farmers who have left South Africa for countries where they are given subsidised support packages, while here in South Africa good money is thrown after bad by opening doors to subsidised food imports and exports and into our

ever failing land reform programme.

We are, of course, also throwing good money after bad by energetically enabling genetically modified foods (GMOs) to be grown on a massive scale by a desperate and shrinking group of self-enriching debt-burdened agri-industrial farmers.

This doubtful crop is then forced down all our throats and particularly down the throats of the poor, via cheap (subsidised) bread, maize and soya meal, and via animal feed. So why quibble about a measly R100 per farmer per month to create un-poisoned, non-GMO, healthy food and livelihoods for millions?

Until we are prepared to pay the true cost of good (and bad) food, subsidies will be needed to produce food. But subsidies can be used to make a genuinely positive and self-help oriented difference.

And that is precisely why I write this next economy article, as invited by SANE, because this simple solution has been modelled and tested among the "unemployable", in Cape Town, and is ready to be rolled out in every village, town and city – anywhere communities eat fresh food.

Through Abalimi, established in 1982, the unemployed become productive micro-farmers, feeding thousands at very low cost and creating hundreds of jobs, off tiny scraps of urban wasteland. The model is ready to be copied nationally.

Around 2 500 family micro-farmers directly feed a minimum of 15 000 family members every year, off home plots. This home garden movement is the foundation of a thriving emergent community garden movement, involving another 500 family micro-farmers in about 100 community gardens. Of these,

nearly 100 family micro-farmers in 20-30 community gardens are involved (since launch of the marketing scheme in 2008) in producing for the market to create permanent self-help jobs. All costing less than R100 per micro-farmer per month, or R20 per family member per month, to keep the whole show on the road.

Money has started to flow: a modest R280 000 last year, but increasing fast, into the hands of scores of previously unemployed micro-farmers, and it keeps coming!

Thousands in Cape Town already eat the freshest, most nutritious, un-poisoned food on earth, grown abundantly on little patches of wasteland. They eat better quality than most of the "rich" who go to upmarket stores. Family farmers often assert that they have become healthy, positive and productive.

Thousands of family micro-farmers collaborate peacefully and help each other to feed uncared sick and poor from their gardens.

Put a price on this and tell me if the "short value chain seed to table" movement does not have the real practical potential to overcome poverty and provide innumerable jobs.

● To collect a box of same-day harvest, seasonal, un-poisoned vegetables in Cape Town, sign up at [www.harvestofhope.co.za](http://www.harvestofhope.co.za)

To find out how to set up your own "seed to table" seasonal vegetable system in any village, town, city, send an enquiry to [info@abalimi.org.za](mailto:info@abalimi.org.za)

To find out more about Abalimi Bezekhaya, visit [www.abalimi.org.za](http://www.abalimi.org.za)

● Small is a family micro-farming practitioner and co-director of Abalimi Bezekhaya (farmers of home) and Harvest of Hope vegetable box scheme in Cape Town. This article is part of the National Dialogue Initiative launched by the Ministry of Economic Development in association with the Cape Times and the SA New Economics network. Earlier contributions can be found at [www.sane.org.za](http://www.sane.org.za). Contributions not exceeding 1 600 words can be emailed to [cteditor@inl.co.za](mailto:cteditor@inl.co.za)

## Puff adder opens can of worms

I WAKE up and my heart's pounding so hard it might burst out of my chest. My anxiety is caused by an approaching rendezvous with a puff adder. Not a puff adder; the Puff Adder. Normally I stay away from snakes and, more importantly, they stay away from me. But today I have no choice: face the Puff Adder or be declared an earthworm, which is to say a chicken. This is no ordinary Puff Adder – this is a supersized 100-metre venomous snake.

The Puff Adder (or Puffie) is the much-talked about technical section on the last day of the Contego Wines2Whales mountain bike adventure. It snakes and slithers its way down the mountainside with tight, twisty corners, treacherous turns, and deadly descents.

I signed up to ride the three-day rocky route from the Winelands to whale-rich Hermanus. My technical riding skills are not the sharpest and I'm worried that if I tackle the Puffie I'll end up with a snake bite.

There is an alternative, non-technical "Earthworm" option, but it's not really feasible. For two days the riders – people who say things like: "Give it horns, boet" and "Dude, check me nail the gnarly trail" – have been licking their lips at the prospect of taking on the Puffie. Mountain bike boytjie culture

Angry Utterances (10) **jonathan ancer**



dictates that you "go big or go home". Unfortunately, there isn't a "go to Mauritius" option.

I can see 759 riders sailing down the Puffie and just one choosing the Earthworm. My cowardice will be exposed. I'll be humiliated. The only one way to save my dignity is to close my eyes and give it horns. Or not. Dignity is so overrated. Besides, where's the dignity in three broken ribs and a cracked collarbone?

I considered worming out of the ride when I heard leopards had been, er, spotted on the trail. Adrian, my teammate, tried to reassure me that leopards only go for the fatties at the back of the herd, but that only made it worse. Much, much worse.

My mind flashes up an image of leopards picking over my bones, vultures circling overhead, hyenas fighting over gnawing rights to my helmet and somewhere a disembodied David Attenborough voice saying: "... And this is all part of the circle of life."

I hop onto the saddle. It's about 20km to the Puffie. I haven't decided what to do. Don't think about it.

With 15km to go it occurs to me that mountain biking is similar to solving crosswords: "Nailing the gnarly trail" and "cracking the crafty clue" is like sashimi, Halle Berry, roasted cashews, Neil Young's *Heart of Gold* and a tax rebate rolled into one.

Just 10km to my date with doom and I'm wobbling all over the place. I distract myself by solving a clue. The first one that pops into my head doesn't help: **Snake is fed up over fad, right? Possibly! (4,5). The answer – Puff Adder – is an anagram ("possibly" is the anagram indicator) of FED UP + FAD + R ("right").**

With less than a kilometre to go I spot a sign. Puff Adder straight. Earthworm right. What will it be? I leave it in the hands of the cross-words. A clue comes into focus: **Snake, I reckon (5)\*.** The cross-words have sealed my fate. I apologise to my collarbone and take a deep breath. But just as I'm about to give the Puffie horns another clue comes into focus: **Choose to suck out the marrow of life (9)\*\*.** Saved by the crossword gods!

\*ADDER: A double definition. A type of snake and someone who reckons, ie someone who adds up.

\*\*EARTHWORM: An anagram ("out" is the anagram indicator) of "the marrow".

## Eight million new wonders of the world

BAH! HUMBUG! That's my personal reaction to the campaign to have Table Mountain declared one of the "New Wonders" of the natural world. "Wat 'n klomp tos," as my late friend, Ronnie Morris would have said.

Besides the fact that the entire campaign has absolutely no standing internationally, why should we be particularly worked up about trying to get some Swiss company that is making billions of bucks to declare our mountain one of the "new" wonders of the world?

Sure, Table Mountain's a nice piece of rock, but it really is nothing more than an accident of erosion. If you want to make geologist jokes, you could say it is a "gneiss big inselberg."

I also think that the people who've put together this "New Seven Wonders" campaign are remarkably unimaginative: Table Mountain is just so in your face, so obvious. A bit like Kilimanjaro, the only other contender from Africa (at least the cloud on Table Mountain lifts from time to time so that we can actually see our lump of rock, as opposed to the poor residents of Moshi and Arusha in Tanzania, who seldom get to see what Kili actually looks like.)

Man Friday **tony weaver**



I mean, there are hundreds of other natural events and features in Africa that could have qualified, but then, I suppose that when you're running a marketing campaign to make some bucks, you don't want to promote anything that can't pay it's own way with branding, merchandising and logo copyrighting. Call me cynical, but I'll bet their marketing guys looked at our genuine natural wonder, the Cape Floral Kingdom and the fynbos biome and said "gee, how do we design a logo that shows 8 000 plants?"

Even harder to stick on a logo (and let's face it, you can't really get warm and fuzzy about them) are the eight million fruit bats that migrate every November from the Congo to the Mushitu swamp forest in the Bangweulu Wetlands of Zambia's Kasanka National Park. It's the world's biggest animal migration, but I suppose that doesn't really qualify as a natural wonder because there is only limited and difficult access to the area, and the surrounding tribes people can't really afford the branding fees.

Then there's the extraordinary Tekeze River valley in Ethiopia, that you look down on from the 3 926m summit of Imet Gogo in the Simien Mountains, and watch as lammergeiers soar below you, while gelada baboons and walia ibex prance around on the rock ledges up to 1 000m below. Not much of a marketing opportunity there, especially as there are still a few land mines left over from the civil war.

Closer to home, in Namibia, there are the magnificent dunes at Sossusvlei, the gravel plains of the Kaokoveld, the seasonal wetlands and the remarkable life they support in Mamili and the Linyanti. Next door in Botswana, there's the absolutely extraordinary Okavango Delta, the Makgadikgadi Pans and the otherworldly fascination of Baine's Baobabs.

If you look carefully at the 28 finalists that this Swiss company has elevated to the final countdown to their seven new natural wonders of the world, they are all international tourist attractions. Why? Because they are accessible to western travellers and are easy to market (with access to tourism dollars to pay for the branding).

Sure, Table Mountain is a lovely piece of rock, but the Drakensberg

has aspects that are far more beautiful from a purely aesthetic point of view. The Chimanimani Mountains in Zimbabwe are prettier. The Aberdares in Kenya make Table Mountain look positively dull, as does Mount Elgon, which straddles the border between Kenya and Uganda.

From the point of view of being unique in terms of both its aesthetic aspect, and the fact that it a) has permanent glaciers and b) has a variety of habitats that range from tropical and Afromontane forest, all the way to Afro-Alpine habitats with giant lobelia groundsel and other weird botanical aberrations, you can't beat the Ruwenzoris in Uganda. But none of them, with the possible exception of the Drakensberg, feature on the package tourist circuit, do they?

Anyway, why stop at seven? Why not all 28 finalists? Then they can split the branding opportunities 28 ways instead of seven.

But then, of course, people won't draw the obvious conclusion – that this *Pop Idols* type competition actually has some link to the original seven wonders of the world as proclaimed by Herodotus and Callimachus of Cyrene (although both world views are equally limited).

Silly me. [tonyweaver@inl.co.za](mailto:tonyweaver@inl.co.za)