

# WestGen International Dairy Tour Visits South Africa's Rich Agricultural Landscape



**Krista Christiuk**

The 2024 WestGen International Dairy Tour to South Africa concluded with awe-inspiring experiences, offering participants a unique glimpse into the country's dairy industry. The 45-member group embarked on a journey that began on January 20th, departing from Vancouver and Calgary, converging in Port Elizabeth on January 22nd.

Upon arrival, the group was welcomed by WestGen's CEO, Chris Parry, President Richard Boonstoppel, and Marketing Manager Krista Christiuk at an Indian Ocean-front hotel. The evening provided an opportunity for travelers to mingle, enjoy a glass of wine, and savor a delightful meal.

On January 23, we began touring the densest farmland of Eastern cape in the Humansdorp area accompanied by South Africa Semex Owner, Matthew Cooke. South Africa is home to 890 dairy farms which boast an average herd size of 1,100 head. Our first stop was Broadlands Holsteins, the farm of David Masterson Family. These 600 purebred Holsteins are milked in a double-26 parlour with no inside housing and operates on 180 hectares of irrigated and 180 hectares of dryland, growing oats, rye grass and chickaree. We noted the 12ft high electric fencing that is not intended to keep animals away - but people. Thankfully, safety was something we never had to worry about.

January 24, we traveled to the Tsitsikamma area where we visited Nigel Lok Farm, situated on 240 acres of irrigated land right along the ocean, home to a herd size of 1,900 head and a 60-point rotary parlour. They employ a dedicated team of 30 working staff. Notably, the farm is committed to the well-being of its employees, providing a daycare facility and a social worker on-site. They plan to implement educational initiatives, including a school on the farm premises, aiming to enhance the skills and knowledge of the workforce. Our group enjoyed the views of Tsitsikamma National Park and some of us hiked up to the suspension bridge, and along the way came across our first animal sightings, Hyraxes, also known as dassies.

Lancewood Dairy has been exclusively breeding Jersey cows since 1994. The primary focus of the farm of 2,300 milk cows revolves around optimizing pastures and maintaining financial stability. The farm places a strong emphasis on providing high-quality pasture grass including rye grass, chickaree, and clover. Regular analysis of

grass quality is conducted, with weekly samples sent to a local lab to monitor forage quality. Cows are supplemented with concentrate as needed. Jersey calves, known for their resilience, are raised in a closed calf house. They receive milk for 60 days, with the goal of doubling their birth weight by weaning. Heifers are bred to calve at 24 months, strategically within the established calving season to seamlessly integrate into the herd.

Just outside of Cape Town was Fair Cape Dairy, a sixth generation farming operation that originated in 1875. The farm has been honored with the title of South Africa Dairyman of the Year four times and currently employs over 2,000 people. The farm covers 2,500 hectares of cultivated land and maintains a herd of 5,000 cows, with 2,600 being milked three times a day, resulting in an impressive daily production of 95,000 liters. They cultivate 800 acres



**Cathy Haagsma photo**

**The group met a family of elephants up close at the Shiduli Private Game Reserve.**



**WestGen CEO Chris Parry is impressed by the lush grass and consistently sound udders of the David Masterson herd. Note the wind turbines in the distance**

**Sheri Kampman photo**



**A trip to South Africa is not complete without a visit to the Cape of Good Hope – the most south-western tip of the African continent!**

**Krista Christiuk photo**

of wheat annually and harvest 20,000 tons of oat silage. Fair Cape Dairy is committed to sustainability, evident in their use of a solar switchover that powers all farm operations with solar energy. Since 2017, the farm has been on a mating program, incorporating Elevate testing in 2018 to fast track their herd improvement. All heifers are bred to sexed, with a focus on conventional breeding in summer months. The majority of the herd is bred to Angus beef, yielding a financial incentive of 1,000 Rand per calf. Immunity+ is a key focus in their breeding

strategy. The top 1-2% of heifers in the herd are flushed, and currently, the farm utilizes three Holstein, three Jersey, and two Ayrshire sires in their breeding program.

Many of the farms we toured in South Africa have a focus similar to New Zealand where production per hectare is their priority, with a low-cost pasture-based model, with many dairies having limited infrastructures.

On the seventh day of our adventure, marking the halfway point, we began exploring around Cape Town, starting with Maiden's Cove. The highlight was a delightful wine tasting session at Groot Sillery Constantia. The winery is the oldest winery in the Southern Hemisphere, with a history dating back to the 17th century! We soaked in the scenic views of the oceanside as we savoured lunch along the Atlantic Ocean at Misty Cliffs. At the Cape of Good Hope, we took a group photo, and some of us enjoyed either a hike or tram rides up to Cape Point to witness the convergence of the Indian and Atlantic oceans. Our day continued with a chance to encounter African penguins at Boulder Beach. These penguins, also referred to as jackass penguins because of their distinctive braying sound, predominantly inhabit this area. Situated near Simon's Town on the Cape Peninsula, Boulder Beach is famous for hosting a substantial colony of these charming birds.

Our eighth day we flew 1,737 km from Cape Town to Nelspruit, where upon landing, we were greeted by antelope and lemurs which met us right outside the airport! The 116km bus trip to Skukuza took us past many macadamia fields.

Once we arrived at the Kruger Gate Hotel, we enjoyed a delicious buffet meal and headed to bed early in anticipation of our first full day game drive through Kruger National Park.

No one slept in as we gathered in the hotel lobby at 4:20am to pick up our bagged breakfast lunch and loaded the 4x4 jeeps, entering the 19,623 km<sup>2</sup> Kruger National Park at 5:15am. Today's game drive was a long day out, especially with the sound of the jeep and the warmth of the African sun lulling us to sleep. There was excitement seeing four of the big five today (no leopard yet) and many other animals which included four of the ugly five – the Marabou stork wasn't spotted today. We finished the day off relaxing at the Kruger Hotel, enjoying views of animals from the large deck and infinity pool.

After breakfast, our coach headed towards Blyde Canyon. This natural wonder is known for being the largest green canyon in the world. The canyon stretches out approximately 25kms in length and reaches depths of 800 meters. From viewpoints we saw the Three Rondavels - three round mountain tops with a shape resembling traditional African huts and further breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape. As our drive continued just over an hour, we enjoyed the scenic views of the Drakensburg mountains and invited our Keynote speaker, Tony DeGroot, member of the AgSafeBC board, to speak on Farm Safety and Mental Health. Tony highlighted that a trip and fall is at the forefront of on-farm injuries. We arrived at our final hotel of the trip, the Shiduli Private Game Reserve and soon headed out on an open jeep safari. Here, some spotted elephants, rhinos, hippos, giraffes, zebras, but the special treat was the pride of lions and their two cubs. We enjoyed two days at Shiduli with four game drives where all travelers had an opportunity to spot the big five.

Our coach took us 425km to Johannesburg where we said goodbye to our group that started as friends and left as family. It had been a remarkable time of sharing in many impactful experiences.

Such an amazing trip to see remarkable dairy operations so vastly different to ours in Canada could not have been organized without the great efforts of our colleagues in South Africa. We must thank Matthew Cooke, owner of Semex South Africa, who



**Darrin Rasmuson photo**

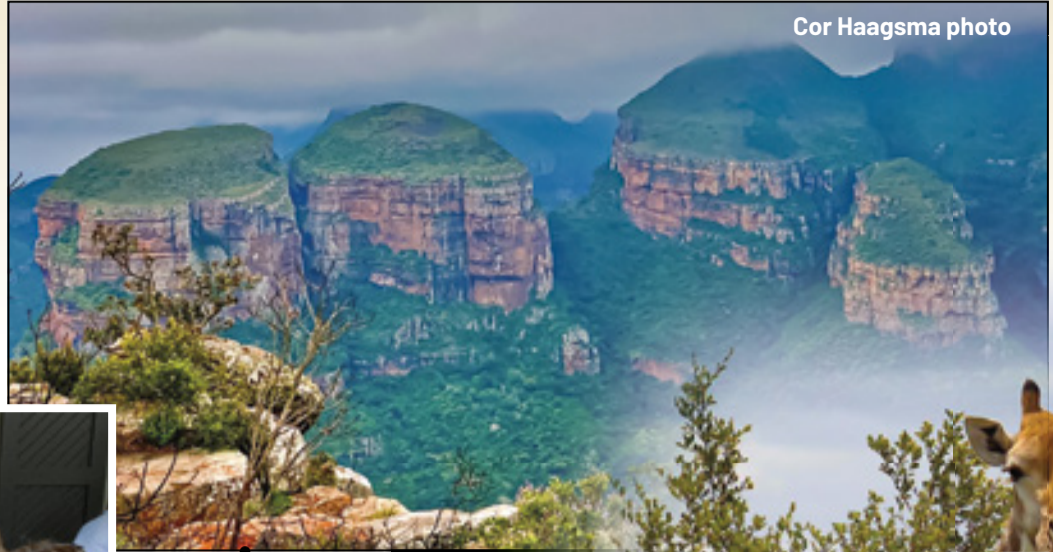
**Visitors were thrilled to see a wide variety of Africa's iconic wildlife at Kruger National Park, without having to cover much of the nearly 20,000 square km!**



spent time with our group for all farm days and the other Semex staff - Benjamin Jansen van Vuuren, Lombard Walters, Melissa Erwee and Mia Mienie, Marketing Manager.

WestGen looks forward to the next international tour in 2026, promising another unforgettable agricultural adventure - connect with us now at: [marketing@westgen.com](mailto:marketing@westgen.com).

Fun was on the menu for this trip, as guests got to know one another over many special meals and evening events, such as the wine/cheese tasting at Fairview Wine and Cheese Estate, which also is home to a sizeable dairy goat herd.



Cor Haagsma photo



Krista Christiuk photo

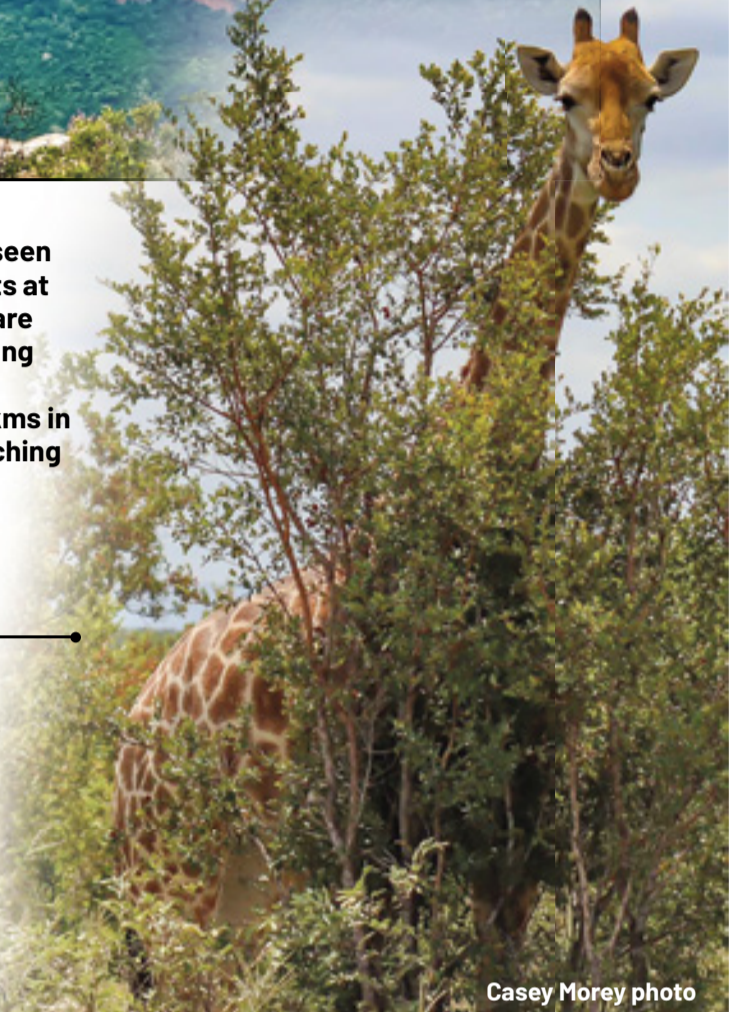
The Three Rondavels, as seen from viewpoints at Blyde Canyon, are part of a stunning green canyon measuring 25 kms in length and reaching depths of 800 meters.



Cor Haagsma photo

Lancewood Dairy milks 2300 Jerseys with an extreme focus on forage quality and pasture-based dairy production.

Shy or trying to look inconspicuous, the wildlife at Shiduli Private Game Reserve presented numerous viewing opportunities for guests.



Casey Morey photo

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