

# **Update to the Third Party Assessment in South Africa**

## **October 2017**

Control Union (CU) assessed Universal Leaf South Africa Pty Limited's (ULSA) implementation of the Agricultural Labour Practice (ALP) program during February and March 2017. There were several areas of improvement identified in the reporting methodology and format which subsequently impacted the release of the report. As a result, a brief overview of progress made by the ULSA team (which had already begun during the 2017 crop season) on the implementation of the action plan to address findings of the CU assessment, is provided below. ULSA has reacted and engaged positively in respect of the risks and problem areas identified in the assessment.

### **ULSA Strategy and Management of the Agricultural Labour Practice (ALP) Program**

ULSA has implemented internal organisational changes and enhanced its engagement with external stakeholders, to add more depth and expertise to its implementation of the ALP program and achieve behavioural change at farm level. These include:

#### **Building Internal Capacity**

Since July 2017, job descriptions for ULSA employees involved with the implementation and management of the ALP program have been reviewed and amended, to ensure clarity of associated responsibilities. Furthermore employee performance measurement tools have been adapted to align personal goals with ALP program objectives.

During the 2017(July & August) tobacco crop season, ULSA's ALP coordinator and field technicians' skills and understanding of the ALP program has increased significantly. Cross pollination with other ULT operations within the African region as well as internal training processes have empowered field personnel to better identify prompt actions and find practical solutions for the issues encountered in their daily work. Greater awareness amongst field technicians of ALP Code related policy and process together with improved monitoring skills during the 2017 crop season has led to over 50 corrective actions being undertaken and action plans agreed in collaboration with farmers. Prompt actions identified were mostly related to the improvement of safety in working conditions ranging from a lack of drinking water to improper handling of Crop Protection Agents (CPA).

The Mobileleaf electronic system for on-farm data capturing and monitoring is fully operational from March 17 and has been adapted to South African requirements. Accurate data is available from the data warehouse and regular reports are being submitted to management for evaluation. This data is reviewed and analysed during monthly Sustainable Tobacco Production (STP) committee meetings for accuracy, root cause analysis and for measurement of progress against program targets. This has enhanced a more formal and effective record keeping system and an improved monitoring. Validation of data will be done through unannounced visit by other field team members to improve accuracy.

## **Enhanced Training and Improved Program Awareness amongst Contracted Farmers and Farm Workers**

Based on data collected through farm by farm monitoring, individual farm ALP risk assessments have been completed in April 17 and ULSA has moved into the next phase of ALP implementation which entails systematic monitoring of all ALP Code principles, specific training programs on a range of topics from handling CPA to protecting farm labour rights etc.

ULSA personnel are using all opportunities to discuss prevalent ALP topics and updates during farmer meetings. The contents of ALP document handouts are being discussed with each farmer to ensure understanding. ULSA has increased the frequency of farm worker training on ALP topics and has aligned the ALP training material to coincide with the crop calendar to ensure that training is focused on issues that are more prevalent during that period.

ULSA has been categorising its contracted farmers from A to D since 2015 based on various production measurements. To date, the categorisation of contracted farmers also takes into account specific ALP related issues and these include:

- The application for corporate permits, where foreign workers are involved;
- Formalisation of employment;
- Issue and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- Avoidance of Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS);
- Recycling of CPA containers;
- Completed first aid training; and
- Availability of safe accommodation.

ULSA continuously reviews the status of the above items and assists farmers to improve their categories. During the farmer contracting process for the 2017/18 crop, 6 farmers (all Category D) were not contracted again due to their failure to improve their performance on these items and show sufficient commitment to ALP.

## **Addressing complex structural and systemic issues**

Key focus areas for ULSA during the implementation of the ALP action plan rollout are related to the legal employment of foreign workers, formalising employment, worker rights, living conditions, and a safe working environment in all tobacco-growing regions. The following focus areas reflect issues faced within the entire agricultural sector in South Africa.

### **Employment of foreign workers**

In the Limpopo growing areas, approximately half of the workforce in agriculture consists of migrants from neighbouring countries. South African farmers find it difficult to access productive local labour resulting in the employment of foreign labour. To be legally employed, all foreign workers need working visas, the application for which is a complex and bureaucratic process within the South African legal system. ULSA has identified and mapped all relevant requirements and procedures and procured

professional support to assist farmers with the regularisation process. Farmers and workers now recognise that this is of importance to the program so as to address and secure foreign workers' rights, working conditions and access to support mechanisms.

### **Support Mechanism (SM)**

The introduction and development of an independent support mechanism with the Department of Labour (DoL) is a central part of the ULSA ALP program. The CU assessment identified gaps amongst farm workers on awareness of the SM and the outcomes of reporting grievances. Following various discussions with the DoL, ULSA has developed a Standard Operating Procedure to assist with the implementation of a SM amongst contracted farms. During 2017, a pilot project was launched in conjunction with the DoL in the Lephalale region providing a formal and structured support mechanism hotline for workers to voice their grievances in confidence, involving more than 60% of the contracted farms. The pilot project has now been extended to Modimolle in the Limpopo region and the DoL continues to manage the anonymous system. The use of the support line amongst workers is still rather limited but the ULSA ALP team has escalated its training to improve labour awareness of the SM. Building trust between farmers and workers to generate positive change in attitudes, customs, and promote more interaction requires time and regular contact between the parties. ULSA continues to provide training and to facilitate that interaction. The SM will be introduced over time to all the other regions.



## Safe Working Conditions

Although most contracted farmers have personal protective equipment (PPE) available, many farmers and workers have failed to use it when required. The monitoring data showed this was a recurring issue with many farmers and workers reporting that they do not use the equipment because of weather conditions (heat). Subsequently, the ULSA team



has provided all farms with standardised PPE to prevent the risk of Green Tobacco Sickness (or Green Tobacco Condition as it is described in the Africa region) (GTS) and for handling CPAs, and has procured training courses to improve farm worker knowledge on the need to wear PPE. Farmers have been encouraged to take a leading role in the mandatory use of PPE on farms. During the 2017 crop season to date, more than 90% of contracted farmers have been issued with PPE kits, with 89% of the farms having received professional training in the handling of CPA and the correct use of CPA PPE. To date 90% of all labour have received training on the correct use of PPE to avoid GTS and training on the dangers of and appropriate guidelines for entering CPA treated fields is ongoing.

Training and support has been provided during this period on the provision of clean drinking and washing water and sanitary services near the work place, and on safe storage issues related to CPA. The success of these initiatives will be evaluated based on ULSA monitoring data and are factors in the farmer categorisation process.

With reference to the recycling of empty CPA containers, ULSA provided a disposal site at the buying station in Limpopo. A process of collecting all empty CPA containers and farm plastics directly from farms has been implemented in Limpopo. In the Eastern Cape suppliers collect empty containers as part of a GAP certification process.

### **Farm Worker Living Conditions**

ULSA together with PMI conducted a farm workers accommodation pilot project at two farms in Limpopo between January - May 2017, to determine the feasibility of an improved self-funded farm workers accommodation on two contracted farms. The basis for this is that the farmer will be able to charge for accommodation if it meets the minimum standard. The pilot project was completed in May 2017 and ULSA will use the learning to determine the feasibility of rolling out the project to their full grower base. Once the proposal has approved, the accommodation measure will be included in the farmer categorization program and offer benefits to compliant farmers and penalise the non-complaint farmers. The projection of the roll-out has been delayed and aimed at crop year 2019, due to prioritisation of other initiatives.



### **Formalising Employment and worker legal rights**

ULSA has intensified the awareness process for all contracted farmers and their workers on the farmers' obligation to adequately inform all employed workers, including foreign labour, about their legal rights. All contracted farmers and their workers completed training on employment conditions on income and work hours, inclusive of minimum wage requirements in August 2017. ULSA has also distributed documentation and posters that spell out workers' legal rights under employment, which must be clearly displayed within the work areas on the farms during the meeting. Farmers have also received template contracts to further formalise the employment of workers, and these documents also list employee rights.

## **Final remarks**

ULSA's ongoing efforts with implementing and embedding the principles of the ALP Code amongst contracted growers and their workers already encompass its ALP action plan, with improved internal organisation and enhanced stakeholder engagement efforts to bring about behavioural change. Sustainable progress will however require a wider commitment from all stakeholders in the agricultural sector. ULSA is committed to do its part and share learnings and promote best practice with others in order to overcome these complex issues within the areas where its farmers are contracted.

ULSA will continue to be a major purchaser of South African Dark Air-Cured tobacco and its commitment to improving farm labour conditions on all farms from which it sources tobacco remains unchanged. The implementation of the ALP Program is an integral element of the partnership with contracted farmers.