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In the next issue

We look ahead to Cereals.....

Under the microscope



The African journey so far.....

It's been six months now since IPF began spreading its wings. We take a look at how the Toolbox is adapting to life in warmer climes!

IPF Africa began life in September of 2014 as a result of Richard Pascall joining the team last year. Over the last six months farmers in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia have joined IPF and there are plans to expand into other areas of Southern Africa later this year.



IPF Africa's first customer - Brink Bosman with Richard Pascall (R)

Born in Zimbabwe, IPF Africa's General Manager Richard Pascall came to the UK in 2010 and studied at the Royal Agricultural University in Cirencester achieving a BSc in International Agribusiness. His work experience to date has ranged from working on farms and managing crop research projects in the UK to educating farmers in northern Kenya on how to implement better conservation methods in agriculture.

Richard's father Dennis is based in Southern Africa and joined IPF as a consultant last year. Dennis farmed in Zimbabwe for 25 years before he lost his

farm during the land reform programme. His operations were hugely diversified ranging from arable crop growing to ostrich farming and game breeding. Dennis' farming experience and knowledge of the area make him an invaluable asset to IPF Africa.

The last six months have been a period of rapid education and adaptation to the requirements of the countries IPF Africa is operating in. Richard and Dennis Pascall have spent many days in cars and aeroplanes; travelling extensively across southern Africa developing a client base aided by Dennis' connections from his time as a commercial farmer in Zimbabwe.



Typical centre pivot arrangement in Zambia, Google Earth

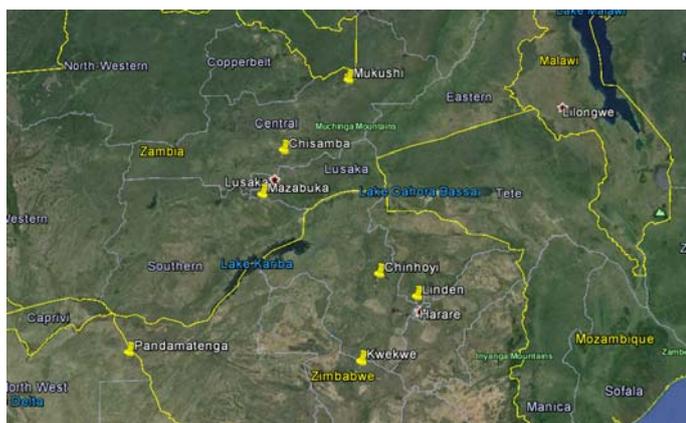
The challenges in Africa

The challenges facing African farmers are clearly very different to UK arable farmers. The political instability and uncertainty over land ownership means farmers are either unable or unwilling to

Intelligent Precision Farming

The scientific approach that puts you in control

invest in new technology. This uncertainty is slowly being replaced by confidence, especially in Zambia where tenures are being secured on the abundance of uncultivated fertile land. This has led to an upsurge of large scale farming over the past five years.

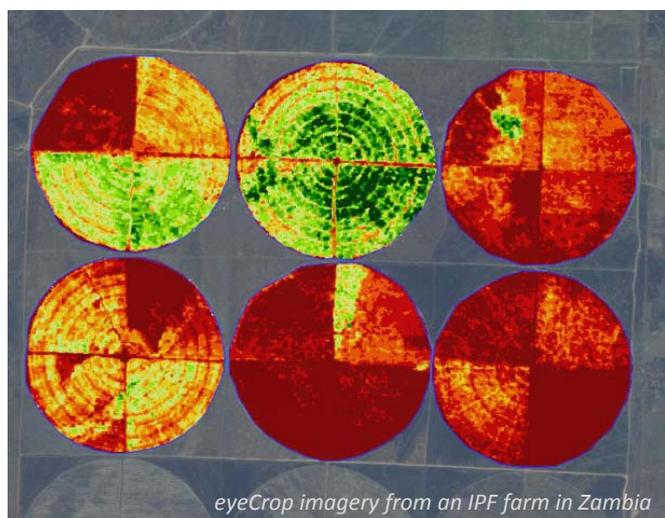


Spread of IPF Africa farmers

Commercial farming in Zambia and Zimbabwe tends to involve centre pivots which can be up to 150 ha or more. With such large areas to manage eyeCrop satellite imagery is a key feature of the IPF package; it has attracted many farmers as there is nothing comparable in Africa.

Always on flat land and with just a few service roads to manage the irrigation system, assessing crop health in pivots is virtually impossible.

Using the satellite imagery as a crop health-checker will enable African farmers to respond rapidly to problems and prevent large-scale damage.

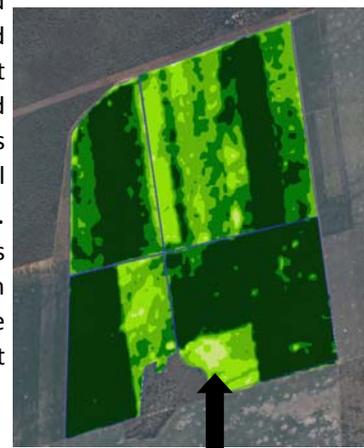


eyeCrop imagery from an IPF farm in Zambia

The harsh climatic conditions, especially in Botswana mean that crop infestations are more likely. African armyworm can destroy a crop in a matter of weeks if left untreated; similarly

stem rust is spreading from eastern Africa and is poised to become a major threat to crops in the south. IPF Africa customers receiving eyeCrop imagery are able to act on areas of poor growth in a way that was impossible before.

Increased transportation costs and taxation mean that crop treatments are more expensive in Africa. The art of pest management is limited compared to the UK and the prophylactic blanket spraying generally adopted is having deleterious effects on the environment as well as farmers' finances. eyeCrop technology has meant that farmers with VRT are now able to use the imagery to better target treatments.



IPF farmer in Botswana with an infestation of army worm highlighted by the eyeCrop imagery

Adapting to operations in Africa

Each country has its own unique challenges and requirements but the versatility of the IPF Toolbox makes it easily adaptable and relevant to each market. The diversity of the Toolbox's functionality gives it a unique standing point in Africa. Being able to adapt the Toolbox has made it possible to work with farmers at different ends of the technological spectrum, with some farmer's working with the most basic specification tractors and others possessing their own RTK base stations.

An initial challenge faced was the fact that the Toolbox uses the RB209 fertiliser manual to make recommendations. Needless to say, many of the crops grown in southern Africa do not feature in the fertiliser manual and the tropical conditions result in alterations being necessary for the existing temperate crops. New recommendations were produced for the African version of the Toolbox by a former head of Agricultural Research in Zimbabwe. For some of the larger estates it was important to be able to create unique rulesets in the Toolbox based on specific crops and growing conditions.

Growers with the appropriate technology are able to apply fertiliser variably and have made significant savings. Where farmers do not have the ability to spread variable rate IPF Africa is able to tailor recommendations using specific blends

to meet the requirements of different fields, rather than blanket applications across the farm.

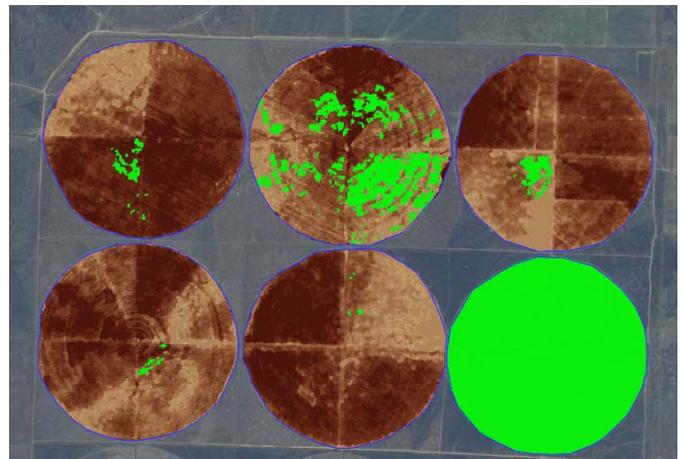
A further area of interest to African farmers is that IPF Africa is completely independent from any fertiliser companies and their sales agendas - this has been a particularly strong and advantageous point. IPF farmer Brink Bosman comments "If someone asks 'what do I think of IPF?' my answer to you is 'they are independent'. That is the bottom line". There remains a long established format of African fertiliser suppliers providing soil analysis and agronomy to farmers free of charge with the expectation of receiving the fertiliser order. As it does in the UK, IPF Africa gives independent fertiliser recommendations by FACTS qualified advisors.

The magical eye in the sky

Soil brightness scanning has highlighted variations in soil across African farms emphasising clearly for the farmers exactly where different soil types begin and end.

Moving forward, IPF Africa hope to increase the area covered by soil brightness, thus furthering the benefits to farmers using the service. There have been some images captured that indicate soil brightness may also be useful in looking at drainage patterns within fields, particularly in the sighting of contours in newly erected centre pivots.

Currently all IPF Africa farmers are covered by 15m resolution satellite imagery, with certain areas being in the path of the 5m imagery. As the market grows and groups of farmers become more established, it will be possible to increase the availability of the higher resolution service to them.



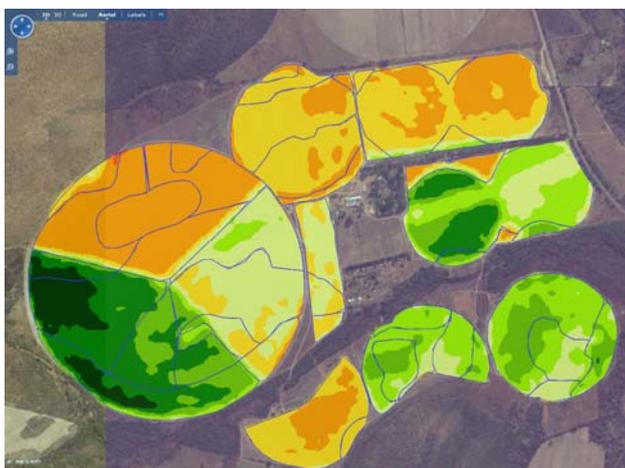
Soil brightness imagery showing soil variation - note the areas of green are covered by crop

Local support

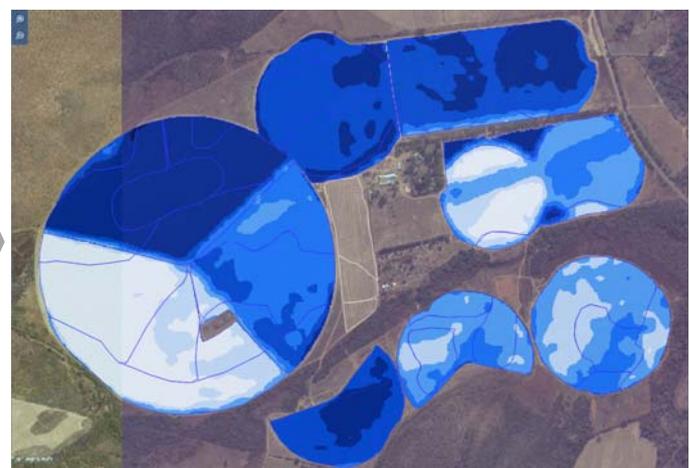
The most important and pressing aspiration for IPF Africa to fulfil is the placement of permanent local account managers on the ground. It is hoped that the first account manager situated in southern Africa will be in place at some time within early 2016. Their role will be to carry out the day-to-day IPF consultancy for farmers within the region as well as providing Toolbox support, making fertiliser recommendations and advising on the use of any precision farming equipment.

Currently IPF Africa is managing 4,400 ha of arable land but this is just the beginning! There are plans in place to significantly increase the area covered by IPF Africa and ensure that the full spectrum of the IPF services is available to all of the farmers.

Want to know more? Visit our website at www.ipf-af.com



eyeCrop imagery showing areas of strong growth (dark green) and areas of poor growth (yellow-brown)



Resultant variable nitrogen plan -.shp files can be downloaded from the Toolbox and inputted to the variable rate spreader