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COVID-19 has significantly changed our current context and the broader economic outlook. Whilst the situation has and will change the world, pandemics such as this have come before. When looking at descriptions<sup>1</sup> of the Antonine Plague of 165 CE, you may be surprised by the similarities to our current situation:

*"It began in the East. At least, that's what the experts think. Maybe it came from animals. Maybe it was the Chinese. Maybe it was a curse from the gods.*

*One thing is certain: it radiated out east, west, north, and south, crossing borders, then oceans, as it overwhelmed the world. The only thing that spread faster than the contagion was the fear and the rumors. People panicked. Doctors were baffled. Government officials dawdled and failed. Travel was delayed or rerouted or aborted altogether. Festivals, gatherings, sporting events—all cancelled. The economy plunged."*

Whilst we are rightly concerned by the uncertainty we experience; it is good to remember that pandemics have and can be overcome. We may want to control this seemingly unknown situation; however, it is better to focus on those things that we can control rather than that which we cannot control.

Our perceptions, mindset and attitude are prime examples of things that we can control. Being calm and focused gives you a better foundation to make rational and fact-based decisions, which is even more crucial in this time of heightened uncertainty.

In the face of the challenges posed by COVID-19, public and private sector collaboration along with a general focus on solidarity can help to get us through this difficult time. Research has shown that businesses can still grow during times of economic downturn. Having a long-term view along with preparation and a growth orientation, can support positive outcomes. Whilst managing the current short-term challenges, a strategic future orientated mindset can be good for agriculture, broader business and the country.

With South Africa in a national lockdown, farmers can continue to produce food and ensure food security. Farming operations are undoubtedly complicated by the lockdown regulations. However, it is important to focus on managing your operations and supporting your staff throughout this period. At the same time, you should not lose sight of potential new opportunities, rather plan to position your farming business for growth when economic activity picks up.

COVID-19's negative impacts, in terms of human life and economic costs, cannot be negated. However, by changing our perspective, we can use this adversity to be stronger and better positioned for the future.

<sup>1</sup> Ryan Holiday (2020): When the System Breaks Down, Leaders Stand Up.  
Available online: <https://dailystoic.com/marcus-aurelius-leadership-during-a-pandemic/>



## Centre of Excellence: Economics & Trade

The Centre of Excellence (CoE): Economics & Trade is active on various fronts to support agriculture's growth and sustainability. For electricity, we lobby to mitigate electricity and fixed cost tariff increases, whilst we have made significant strides in opening up regulations for the use of renewable energy in agriculture. The diesel refund system is the only form of support for South African farmers, we continuously engage with the South African Revenue Service (SARS) as problems arise and we have provided extensive commentary on the proposed new system that is currently in development by SARS and the National Treasury. This will be followed by our inputs and participation during the forthcoming public consultation workshops. We have also played a significant support role for Statistics SA to make a success of the recent Census of Commercial Agriculture (CoCA). We have developed an easy to use property rates guideline document, which is currently being updated, to help farmers to manage their property rates and interact with their municipalities.

The CoE's work is focused on what is best for agriculture, especially policies that have an impact on farmers' bottom line, our commitment towards agriculture is what drives us in our day-to-day work to serve our farmers.