

Brisk trade and lively learning at the Agroecology Farmer Fair

The first ever Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair took place in Mtubatuba, northern KwaZulu-Natal, over two days in October.

The event facilitated exchanges of seed, produce and learning between farmers from different areas, as well as between long-time agroecology farmers and upcoming young farmers.

On the first day, the vibrant Farmer Fair included a lively agroecology produce market, celebrations, presentations and demonstrations.

Presentations on topics that were requested by agroecology farmers during the build up to the Fair included: beekeeping; government institutional buying – the process; how PGS (participatory guarantee system) works; and experiences of marketing to and supplying local retailers.

Demonstrations by local agroecology farmers on how to make delicious products from agroecology produce included: vegetable and fruit juice (*Nonhlanhla Mkhize*); jams (*Mabongi Mkhize*); peanut soup (*Corrine Mngomezulu*); the best chilli sauce (*Gugu Mtshali*); sweet potato juice (*Nomusa Ngwenya*); and beetroot juice and cake (*Zimele*).



Brisk trade at the Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair.

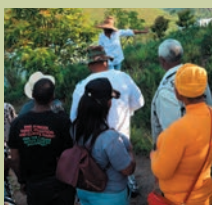
The next day, farmers gathered to dialogue and share knowledge and experiences on farmers' rights in practice, the revival of farmer-led seed systems, and of restrictive policies that undermine their rights and food sovereignty. Their statement, which passionately articulates why farmers' rights are crucial, can be read on the Biowatch website at this link: shorturl.at/fisZ1

Nick Molver, ever-caring, ever-patient, long-standing Biowatch staff member and SKI Comms and Media Officer, tragically passed away with his wife, Matri.



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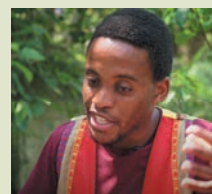
The 4th KZN Agroecology Platform learning exchange, "*Creating value for farmers and community*" took



place on the south coast from 15–17 November.

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As part of the SKI farmers' rights campaign Biowatch-supported agroecology farmers spoke out



about the importance of seed and farmers' rights.

See page 4

From the director

Reflecting on 2022, a highlight was the Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair held in October – a wonderful event, with the photos on the cover page speaking to this! Do also watch the interviews with farmers – see the youtube link in the back page caption.

Another highlight was the process from the Agroecology Farmer Fair and local deliberations on farmers' rights to a regional farmers' rights "caravan" culminating in a SKI "Securing Farmers' Rights in Southern Africa" workshop and seminar in Lusaka. This was jointly hosted by the NRF/DSI Bio-economy Research Chair at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Zambian Alliance for Agroecology and Food Sovereignty (ZAAB).

What also stood out in 2022 was the cumulative impact of the "Come and See" events held at farmer homesteads, which are followed by the Biowatch agroecology training programmes of *AE Qalisa* and *AE Qhubeka* – a consistent spreading and deepening of agroecology at local and provincial levels.

Much of our work speaks to resilience in the face of climate change and biodiversity destruction. But it is not enough. The current unrelenting heatwave that we are experiencing in this province, juxtaposed with the devastating floods of April and May 2022 where more than 400 people lost their lives, speaks to climate change happening in front of our very eyes.

If you haven't had a look at our *Fact Sheet: Climate change and the industrialised food system* do have a read (<https://biowatch.org.za/download/factsheet-climate-change-and-food/>). It was such a helpful document to support both our public seminar and the Daily Maverick webinar (see page 3), but also with our presentation to the national Portfolio Committee on Environment, Forestry and Fisheries on the Climate Change Bill at their public hearings in October. We appreciated presenting to the Committee and the seriousness with which it received the submissions. The promulgation of the Climate Change Act is now needed!

Yours in solidarity,
Rose Williams

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Tribute to Nick Molver

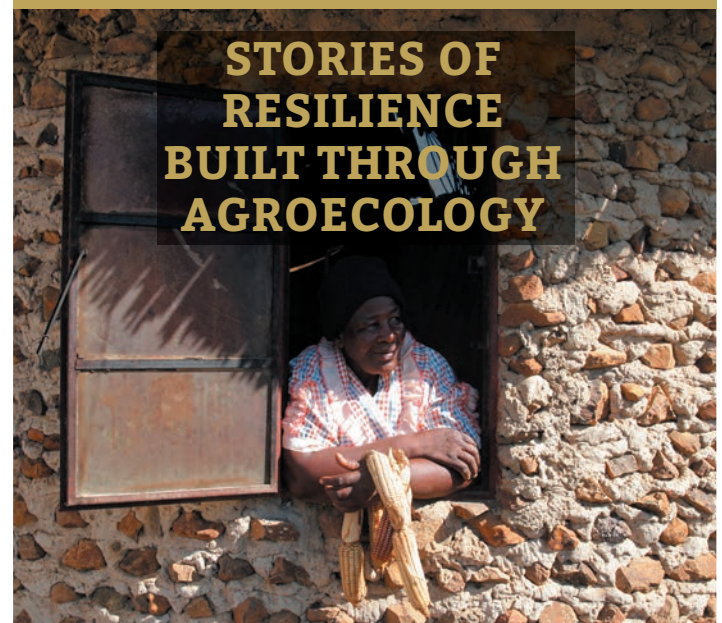
Nick Molver, ever-caring, ever-patient, long-standing Biowatch staff member and SKI (Seed and Knowledge Initiative) Comms and Media Officer, tragically passed away with his wife, Matri, in September 2022.

The cause of their deaths is deeply shocking at all levels – the illegal fumigation of the flat adjoining theirs, the production and sale of lethal agri-chemicals, the system that produces these, and the lack of understanding about pesticides. And then the flagrant disregard of by-laws and other legislation and the nightmarish process Nick and Matri's families are undertaking to hold those responsible to account so that others do not suffer a similar tragedy.

The brave and extraordinary memorial held by the couple's families to remember and celebrate their lives was a gift to all who knew and loved Nick and Matri. Our deepest condolences to their families, friends and colleagues.

Hamba kahle, dearest Nick. We love and miss you. Your impact in Biowatch, in SKI, and on all those who had the privilege of working with and alongside you, will be felt and missed for a long, long time.

Farmers speak out about living and thriving in troubled times:
2020–2022



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The 4th KZN Agroecology Platform learning exchange, “Creating value for farmers and community” took place on the south coast from 15–17 November. Although organised by Biowatch, each day was hosted by different platform member organisations.

On the first day SK Agricare inspired the 38 CSO staff and lead farmers attending with their centre for growing and producing organic herbal products in Dududu. The second day explored Thanda’s off-grid Community Centre in Qwabe, Nyangwini. On the last morning Siyavuna introduced their approach to community upliftment through various training and income generation projects growing organic vegetables and niche produce.

The exchange generated much discussion about the values that shape approaches to the distribution, marketing and value addition of agroecological produce and how this can be used for wider community benefit.



WEBINAR

OUR BURNING PLANET

ARE WE EATING OUR WAY TO CLIMATE CHAOS?

TRANSFORMING THE INDUSTRIALISED FOOD SYSTEM FOR CLIMATE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

MARK HEYWOOD
Maverick Citizen Editor

VANESSA BLACK
Advocacy, Research and Policy Coordinator, Biowatch

MERVYN ABRAHAMS
Programme Coordinator, Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity

Public seminar: Eating our way to climate chaos

The Biowatch public seminar held at the Durban Botanic Gardens in August drew attention to the climate impact of the industrialised food system.

For those who couldn’t make it to the public seminar, presentations were recorded and can be watched at <https://biowatch.org.za/public-seminar-eating-our-way-to-climate-chaos-recordings/>

1. Vanessa Black, (Biowatch SA): Climate change and the industrialised food system: what the science is telling us.
2. Andrew Bennie (independent researcher): False solutions to the climate crisis.
3. Rose Williams (Biowatch SA): Agroecology for food sovereignty and climate justice.

In a follow up to the Biowatch Public Seminar, a Daily Maverick Citizen webinar on 1 September was hosted by Mark Heywood, Maverick Citizen Editor, in which Biowatch’s Vanessa Black and Mervyn Abrahams, Programme Co-ordinator, Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity, unpacked the industrialised food system in South Africa and its effects on climate change. You can read a write up on the webinar, which includes a link to the recording, here: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-09-02-food-in-chains-our-industrialised-system-is-killing-people-and-the-planet/>

Regional farmers' rights campaign

In 2022, Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) partners collaborated in a campaign for farmers' rights. These are customary rights to maintain and develop crop genetic resources through using, selecting, saving, sharing and selling seed or propagating material.

From August, SKI partners held a series of local seed fairs and farmer exchanges in a regional Farmers' Rights Caravan (see page 1 for a report on the Biowatch event). These built up to a week-long farmer travelling exchange in Zambia in October, culminating in a four-country farmer dialogue to articulate the ways in which government and development partners should support farmers to strengthen their rights and seed systems. Their demands were presented at the "Securing Farmers' Rights in Southern Africa" seminar in Lusaka 25–26 October, hosted by the NRF/DSI Bio-economy Research Chair at UCT and the Zambian Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity. The event was both a celebration and robust reflection on SKI's seed work to date. Participants included SKI partners, guest experts and government representatives. The rich discussions unpacked what farmers' rights are, the legal status of farmers' rights, and various strategies for working collectively to strengthen these in the region. This included an exploration of how SKI can contribute to the varied measures and best practices for realising farmers' rights documented under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Biowatch looks forward to taking this work forward in 2023, especially exploring ways to share and protect farmer seed varieties outside of the property ownership paradigm South Africa's current seed laws are based on.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- *AE Qalisa* training: 13–17 February
- Book launch | *Stories of resilience built through agroecology*: Durban Botanic Gardens, 4 April
- Watch out for the release of "*The Last Seed*" – produced by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in co-operation with AFSA, Biowatch South Africa, and PELUM Tanzania. Watch the trailer at: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/the-last-seed>

For more info sign up to our mailing list at www.biowatch.org.za

Agroecology farmers speak out

**Securing farmers' rights in Southern Africa:
Our seeds. Our rights. Our lives.**

As part of the regional Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) farmers' rights campaign (see opposite), Biowatch-supported agroecology farmers spoke out about the importance of seed, of farmer-led seed systems, and of the restrictive policies that undermine their rights and food sovereignty. Together, they raised their voices for concrete action and legal recognition of farmers' rights.



A playlist of agroecology farmers speaking out – including interviews with Phindo Phakathi (above), Tholakele Mfekayi, Nonhlanhla Mkhize, Petros Makhanya, Ndoza Fadane, Thombithini Ndwandwa and Sandile Madlala – is available on the Biowatch youtube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLt-W2SSMTtD-5dQt4UxufYGNDwP3H0HSN>.

Regional Healthy Soil, Healthy Food programme

Healthy Soil Healthy Food (HSHF) programme partners met in person for the first time in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 14–17 September. Biowatch is one of 15 participants from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Togo, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and South Africa in the programme, which is jointly facilitated by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) and the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI).

Participants gave inspiring presentations on their progress since the programme's initiation in Kenya in 2017. Key messages were crafted to feed into a Convening the next week titled "Africa's roadmap to adaptation and mitigation through Agroecology" hosted by AFSA and the Climate Change Consortium for Ethiopia in preparation for the COP27 on Climate Change.