

ABUNDANT HARVEST

Leadership in Action



Western Cape
Government

Agriculture

BETTER TOGETHER.

ABUNDANT HARVEST

Leadership in Action

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of Agriculture:**

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gaveville Trophy at IWSC.



1989 *****
Vintage 1989. Highest Scoring
at IWSC. in London.



1990 *****
Average Vintage



1991
Beyers wins Robert Mondavi Trophy
for International Winemaker of the Year.



1981 *****
al and diesel account.
120.29 (12 mths!)



1985 *****
Pinotage 1985 gets Beyers
Dinersclub Winemaker award in 1987



1986
Kanonkop releases Wine Futures
Paul Sauer - R125 per bottle



1979 ***
secondary fermentation
in bottle - ouch!



1980 ***
Boland Coetzee's last
vintage on Kanonkop



1981 ***
Beyers makes his first wine ever -
on Kanonkop!



1974 *****
Solid-reds
till drinking well.



1975 ***
Boland Coetzee then Winemaker at
Kanonkop, plays for the Boks.



1976 ***
Paul Sauer receives Constantia
award post mortem.

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INTRODUCTION

Joyene Isaacs, Head of Department

'Leadership in action' is such a powerful statement, and depicts an agricultural sector, with untapped, but not unnoticed potential at all levels. It provides a clear step away from the perception of 'farm workers' as just farm workers, and highlights the role the collective plays in shaping the current and future generations on and off farms.

Leadership in its simplest form, means to lead by example and to be the role model in a community, a business and a society. In this collection we celebrate the agri workers that stood up, and said 'Here I am' with pride and conviction. They showed that being in any employment, no matter which level of an agricultural enterprise, creates the opportunities to grow. It also showcases the sector's finest, of whom we can be proud of.

On the other hand 'in action' means that the agri workers are on the move, or rather they are movers and shakers for a sector, that often finds itself battling the negative perceptions and stigmas, and they can (and will) create the momentum to change perceptions and challenge the status quo. The agri worker winners make a formidable group of individuals and a team to tackle the negativity of the sector.

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture salutes these men and women, who stand as a testament of determination, dedication and sheer love of agriculture and leaders in the agricultural sector. Better together, the agri workers, farmers, retailers and government reflect a challenging and changing sector, making sure we have food. ●





FOREWORD

Minister Alan Winde, Western Cape Minister
of Economic Opportunities

The stories featured in this edition of Abundant Harvest showcase the shifting perceptions of agricultural work.

Part of this process was renaming the Farmworker of the Year competition to the 2016 Western Cape Prestige Agri Awards.

There is a stigma attached to the idea of agriculture work, shaped in part by the legacies of the past.

Challenges still remain in the sector and that is why when I received the portfolio of agriculture, I was committed to restoring dignity and respect to this profession.

Agriculture is an economic powerhouse in the province, employing over 150 000 people. Our high-quality products are in demand across the world.

Through our Project Khulisa growth strategy we are seeking to add up to 100 000 jobs to the agri-processing sector. This is significant for agriculture, with its backward link to agri-processing.

Agricultural workers have to benefit from this projected growth, and they need the skills to be able to take advantage of opportunities in this sector. This is a priority of mine.

I am encouraged by the profiles included in this publication. Past winners such as Jerome Thomas provide valuable feedback on how we can continue to improve our support to the winners of the competition, through assistance with starting agri-business ventures.

Together, we will work with our partners such as the Agri Workers Prestige Forum, to build a strong and united agriculture sector. ■



PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS

GROW LEADERS

The Western Cape Prestige Agri Awards (previously the Farm Worker of the Year Competition) has become a bastion on the labour landscape of agriculture in the Western Cape, lauding those who work the land, those without whose physical effort there would be little or no food on the plates of the citizens of South Africa.

From humble beginnings in 2002 it has shown incredible momentum – its inspiration circling through-

out the province and touching lives on hundreds of farms. In 2002 Elsa Jordaan and the Hex River Valley Table Grape Association initiated a competition for agri workers from their region and received a total of 36 entries.

“I grew up in the Karoo and always had a deep respect and appreciation for agri workers’ strong faith, extreme perseverance and their unique sense of humour,” remembers Elsa.

“When Sanlam approached me with a sponsorship for a Farmer of the Year competition in the Hex Valley, I asked that we rather organise a competition for agri workers.” Three years later the Western Cape Department of Agriculture joined this venture as a sponsor and since then it has developed into the flagship project of the Department’s sub-programme for agri worker development.

2008



Joseph Plaatjies

“Agri workers represent an employment category often looked upon with disdain; seen as a job for those without any other opportunities and the lowest

of educations,” says Danie Niemand, director of agri worker development. “We’ve been working hard to change this image, to help create a platform for agri workers to speak out, and a safe place for producer and agri worker to engage openly. The Western Cape Prestige Agri Awards has at its core a focus to acknowledge agri workers for their invaluable contribution to agriculture and to change the way they view themselves. At the same time, we’ve seen the perception of producers change.”

2011



Sageas McKenna

2010



Christo Somers

The competition awards agri workers the opportunity to showcase their skills and abilities in various categories, including general worker, tractor driver, administrative personnel, animal production, technical operator, irrigation specialist, social development (crèches, health work, etc.), agri-processing, foreman, junior management and middle management. An additional category for the entrant with the best potential for future achievement was recently added. Workers first compete at regional level and winners are honoured during various regional events with prizes including certificates, trophies, monetary rewards, and training and travelling opportunities. Shoprite are the valuable sponsor of the competition, enabling the department to continue to host this competition and to award significant prizes for the winners.

Thereafter, these winners compete provincially for the honour of being heralded the Western Cape Agri worker of the Year. “The whole process has been designed to build self-esteem and to unite people,” says Danie. “On the one hand the initial process of entering brings the producer and the agri worker together, while the interviews demand a next level of confidence from the entrants.” The interviews at this level include questions regarding BEE, communication, labour law, transformation and productivity, as well as agriculture related social and health matters. Joy van Biljon from the Koue Bokkeveld Training Centre is very enthusiastic about the agri awards. “I’ve been in charge of organising the Witzenberg regional prestige awards since 2005 and over a 1000 agri workers have taken part since then,” she says.

2012



Wimpie Paulse

“The competition is effectively breaking down the negative perception of agri workers. We all thrive on acknowledgement, don’t we! We believe, however, that the competition cannot exist in isolation and that agricultural associations, producers and agri workers have to work together to bring about the necessary changes.”

According to Danie Niemand it has not always been plain sailing: “In the beginning some producers were sceptical about the intentions of the competition,” he says. “But they soon saw that winners became mentors and the value of the competition really lies therein that there are actually no winners and losers in the strict sense of the word – only inspired people, aiming higher.” One of the other obstacles was that there was a feeling that only those with higher education had a chance to win. “We brought in the category for the entrant with the best potential and decided to scrap the category for senior management to make sure we give agri workers from all levels an equal opportunity.”

2013



Kolie Paulse

The Prestige Agri Worker Forum is another worthy outcome of the process. All provincial winners join this group who regularly meets with the provincial MEC to raise and consult regarding issues related to agri workers. Members of the forum are held in high esteem as they are often requested to deliver motivational speeches at agri worker events.

2015



Alexious Shoko

“Unfortunately other provinces have not yet grasped the magnitude of the positive impact that this competition has on the various role-players in agriculture,” says Danie. “It has always been our dream that others would follow in our footsteps so that agri workers all over the country can have a chance to grow as we’ve seen happen here.”

The Western Cape Prestige Agri Awards in essence shines a spotlight of honour on the career of an agri worker – thanking them for their contribution towards the sustainability and growth of agriculture in this province.

“We salute you!”

In 2015, following a voting process, it was unanimously decided to change the term farm worker to AGRI WORKER. The name of the competition was also changed from “Farmworker of the Year” to WESTERN CAPE PRESTIGE AGRI AWARDS.



You could say that we help manage the competition; we give direction and serve as mouth piece for the workers. We are making a contribution towards the future and growth of agri workers as a group and aim to continuously improve the image of agriculture

FACTS & FIGURES

2002

36 entries
1 region

2016

1 245 entries
15 regions

Total agri workers entered to date:

9 369 (Nine thousand three hundred and sixty nine)

Number of categories:

11 (Eleven)

Overall winner's prize:

R20 000 cash, Shoprite voucher to the value of R20 000, trophy, iPad Air to the value of R10 000 + data to the value of R1 000 and an overseas study tour to the value of R60 000.

In addition:

Inclusion in the Prestige Agri Worker Forum which meets with the Minister of Economic Opportunities quarterly.





ALEX
SHOKO



I HAVE THE ENERGY TO DO MORE

Alexious (Alex) Shoko's walk with agriculture has taken him on interesting, but often trying paths. Though life almost had him change direction, his love of the land eventually guided him to his current position on the management board of the thriving Mouton Valley Farm in Piket-Bo-Berg.

Alex's grandfather was a cook for a farmer in Zimbabwe and his father obtained a certificate in agriculture and worked as farm manager and later an extension officer. Despite his initial desire to have a job that would have him driving a bakkie like the extension officer that visited his father when he was in

primary school, his aptitude for science turned his interest to engineering. In the end, agriculture won and Alex completed a 2-year certificate in agriculture. "This was a time when agriculture in Zimbabwe was still flourishing, there were good rains and harvests and the training was of a high standard," he says.

Upon completion of his studies Alex worked as a teacher, teaching agriculture and science for a while, but soon chose to return to college for another two years, graduating with a diploma in agriculture.

“

In Grade 5 I decided I would one day be an agricultural extension officer. The reason then: an extension officer visited my father and I was impressed that he drove a bakkie.

Again he was railroad from becoming an extension officer when he was offered a position as farm manager on a farm growing maize, tobacco and raising cattle. “I enjoyed the challenge.”

In 1996 he joined the government’s Ministry of National Affairs and Cooperative Development as a co-operative officer responsible for farm management of the numerous cooperative farms. Government, and consequently Alex, was responsible to train and help the beneficiaries to develop their enterprises.

The opportunities in agriculture was abundant and in 2000 Alex once again exchanged his position for that of a farm manager, “but two years later the land reform process started, commercial farms were given to emerging farmers, and I lost my job.” He returned to the Department of Agritechs as an extension officer until 2007, when the dire economic situation in his country forced Alex and his wife to search for greener pastures in South Africa. “Due to inflation, one pair of shoes was the only thing I could buy with my last salary.” For a while Alex, who desperately wanted to once again apply his experience and skills in the agricultural sector, had to work as a ‘dugga boy’ in Johannesburg.

After a stint as gardener and a short contract at a nursery, Alex applied for a position of gardener advertised by the farm neighbouring his current employer. “I bought the FarmersWeekly every week to look for relevant jobs,” he shares. “It was such a relief to at least work on a farm once again! I was now able to support my family in Zimbabwe.” (His children were still in a boarding school there.)

Within four months, Alex obtained a position as team supervisor on the neighbouring Mouton Valley Farm.





“

I now have friends all over the Province! The composition of competitors – coloured, white, women, men, Xhosa, Sotho, and Zimbabwean – builds a connection between people with the same purpose: productivity. There is no segregation in participation – it reflects the balance of the real agricultural society.

“They must have recognised my skills and proposed that I help look for contract workers and then supervise them,” he explains. “By the end of the year I was managing two teams of 16 men each, and soon eight teams and then eight supervisors whom I had to manage.”

“I knew about the competition, but did not consider myself worth competing. In 2015 my manager, Rikus, nominated me and although I was hesitant, I decided to try. Winning on regional level encouraged

me to go forward.” About the competition he says, “Everything is being done in an honest and transparent way; the panel asked fair questions and the member who introduced me, made me feel comfortable and confident.”

“And then it was the gala dinner – such a splendid event!” he remembers. “Before they announced my name I was really thinking that the one who will win is very fortunate and I was keen to know who this person would be. I had no hope that it would be me.





Suddenly they called my name – I jumped and ran. Really honestly, I've never seen myself so happy! I was really moved. Every day when I remember that image of me on stage, I can see it is possible for me to be happy to that extent. I felt honoured that people noticed my contribution to the agricultural industry."

According to Alex the competition has greatly contributed to the relationship between workers and farmers. "It made me realise that Mouton Valley is a company who values and supports me – everyone saw that. I tell everyone that my winning is a result of the training they provided me with, the mentorship of people such as Jan van Wyk (a previous winner) and the general way in which this farm's management treats their workers."

Alex's prize for claiming the overall winning position in 2015 included a significant cash amount and a visit to an international agricultural conference held in

India. "Researchers, lecturers, officials and producers from different countries gathered to discuss problems and to identify a way forward," he shares. "The exposure to the international agricultural community, the different ideas and solutions offered opened my eyes. I've been working in agriculture for some 24 years and thought that I had done enough. After the conference I realised I'm still young; I felt rejuvenated and now I have to learn and achieve more; I still have time to make a difference." Alex is consequently determined to obtain his Agric Master's degree.

"I have the ability and the energy to do it! The competition has not only changed my life, my whole family now feels that they can achieve more."

"I have a passion for agriculture – I feel that I can make a contribution, I cannot do anything outside of this wonderful sector." ●



ANDRÉ
THOPS



AGRICULTURAL AMBASSADOR

A conversation with André Thops confirms that he is the ideal spokesperson for agriculture. Not only is he well-spoken (perhaps due to his experience as a teacher), but he has had exposure to being a farmer, has worked in primary and secondary agriculture and has a first-hand experience of transformation as one of the first coloured farm managers in the Valley.

During his four-year term as a teacher, he did holiday work for Boetie Auret, a De Doorns farmer. “In

1994 Boetie approached me regarding a permanent position,” he says.

“He truly was a pioneer in the Valley; he attached no value to the issue of race-related capacity and I managed one of his farms for him.” A table grape diploma at Elsenburg (3 years distance learning with experiential training on the farm), various courses presented by Jan and Eunice Avenant, as well as a bursary for HR training from The Netherlands government prepared André for his career change.



Die kompetisie het gemaak dat ek meer verantwoordelik
voel teenoor landbou: ek moet nou rolmodel wees in alle
opsigte – nie net praat nie, maar doen!
‘n Wenner het volgelinge wat kyk wat hy doen.



In addition to working with Boetie Auret, André farmed John Dycey's farm and was farm manager for Fanie Swarts. "Although I thoroughly enjoyed the challenges of this sector, I knew that primary agriculture would not be my life. For a while I owned a farm in the Valley and farmed with olives, but later sold the land in favour of renting land." André's skills set and his vast experience enables him to make an instrumental contribution on various platforms: he acts as board member of the Elsenburg College Board; he is a director of the De Doorns Wine Cellar and vice chairperson of the Hex Valley Water Users' Association.

In 2004 Elsa Jordaan, the 'mother' of this competition, convinced him to participate. "She simply never took 'no' for an answer," he remembers. "The prize money was a mere R500, but then, the value of the competition has never been about the money." André adds that the acknowledgement one receives is invaluable: "The media attention and the feedback from fellow community members and industry role players confirm that you are doing something right. It gives one a psychological advantage, a standing, a legitimate voice." At that stage André was already training other farmers in the area.

The benefits of this competition is not only visible in the lives of the winners. "You can clearly see the growth that has taken place when someone enters for a second time," he says. "People embrace the process of benchmarking them against others on their level and then improving where they realise they can." He feels satisfied with the measure of participation by women: "One sees that women – even in the deeper rural areas of the province – are increasingly signing up for training courses.





“

The name change from Farmworker of the Year to Prestige Agri Awards will hopefully make the competition ‘colourless’.



They can now enter (and excel) in any of the traditionally male categories.”

For the Western Cape Department of Agriculture’s programme for farm worker support and development André has much praise: “Danie Niemand’s sub-programme is a well-oiled machine. The competition is approached scientifically to make sure no one is treated unfairly or favoured in some way.”

As often-time judge on provincial level, André experiences that candidates are increasingly well-prepared for the interviews. “Their level of work-related knowledge and general knowledge of the sector and the economy have undoubtedly improved. The questions that were asked five years ago are almost irrelevant today – the organisers have kept it challenging.

Entrants now have to know why something is being done, not merely how it should be done. They have

to understand the consequences of all they do on the farm.”

He admits that there remains a margin allowing for improvement: “In time we’d like to see white agri workers also participate in the competition, but the name and origin of the competition have, and will most probably still, exclude this group.” Another challenge is the fact that most often the overall winner is the winner of a management category. “It is in essence understandable for these are most often the people with higher levels of business acumen, are comfortable expressing themselves and easily slips into the role of agricultural ambassador, but perhaps we can resolve this creatively.”

Further studies are now on the cards for André (in addition to time spent on his successful online wine sales business). “It seems everything that I do inevitably keeps me involved in agriculture in some way. Agriculture has been good to me.” ●



**ANTONIE
VISAGIE**



The competition takes you to a new level. Your whole family has to adapt to the new image. Yes, you enjoy a certain amount of fame, but simultaneously a huge responsibility to set an example.



NEW HORIZONS

“You and me, sitting across from each other in the Wimpy, drinking coffee – this is an example of what the competition has changed for me,” says Antonie Visagie, overall winner of the 2005 round of the Agri Worker competition, during our interview.

Antonie grew up as the son of agri workers. “I grew up in a different era, opportunities were fewer and leadership positions on farms weren’t available for us.

“You might have other dreams, but you start helping out on the farm and you realise the work is interesting. Something holds you back and then you realise ... this is your place, you love it.”

Antonie reminisces about the 1980’s when leading farmers in the Hex Valley started the transformation process where employment equity is concerned. “The Dicey’s were some of the first farmers to start the change, even before ‘transformation’ was a term,” he says. “But Ian Dicey had vision.

“

Through the competition I have been given a voice. And I use it.

He opened my eyes for the responsibility of leading; of taking ownership.

Those days one was quite uncomfortable when you were raised to a position of leadership,” he says. “At one stage I was even my own father’s supervisor. You can imagine how that went down when I had to return to our family home at night!” He smiles broadly.

Training at Kromme Rhee opened up horizons for Antonie. “I had the practical knowledge about farming, but now, through the added theoretical exposure, I discovered greater possibilities of a career in agriculture and I wanted to learn more and more.”

Antonie’s tryst with the competition first came in 2002 when he participated and won the middle management category. In 2005 the competition had expanded to a province-wide level and Antonie entered again and won the position of overall winner. At that stage, and up to 2009, he worked at Mooigezicht Estates: “I benefited tremendously from the knowledge and guidance of owners Stephanus and Francois Rossouw.”

“I never really imagined the consequences of winning such a competition,” he says. “You win and suddenly it’s in the newspapers and AgriTV approaches you and you have to deliver speeches all over – naturally I was a bit stressed, even overwhelmed!”

A win is secondary to the growth

“Upon winning this competition, one receives great job propositions and it is quite natural for your employer to feel threatened. Of course he has invested in you and wouldn’t want to lose you. It is very important that you keep the relationship healthy and open.”









According to Antonie, not coming first in this competition is only negative when you enter with the wrong expectations. "See this always firstly as an opportunity to improve yourself – then even just being nominated equals a win. Remember, here you can benchmark yourself against people from all agricultural industries across the province! The standard of the entries and the difficulty level of interview questions have undoubtedly increased, but our people are now more ready than ever to handle this!"

"The competition opens up a whole new world. You experience, think and reason about and come to understand a whole range of new things.

Your life changes. And then you come back to the Valley and you share what you've seen and heard and learnt with those around you. You start inspiring others about all the opportunities in agriculture."

"The competition has undoubtedly improved the relationship – and communication – between employer and employee on farms, and relationships and perceptions within the broader community have also been touched."

Antonie embraces the new horizons that the changing landscape of agriculture, including this worthy competition, have offered him. "I have been given a voice and I use it." ●



CATHLEEN
BEERWINKEL



QUIETLY MAKING HER MARK

Behind Cathleen (Cathy) Beerwinkel's seemingly demure demeanour one finds a strong and opinionated woman who has always known what she wants from life, and has steadily but surely grafted a career in the Hex Valley.

"I was born on the farm Arbeid Adelt," Cathy reminisces. "My single-parent mother was an agri worker and although she made sure we finished matric, there was no money for further studies. Even though this was an environment I was familiar with, I desperately wanted to rather be a nurse or a secretary.

After a stint of six months in Wellington to see if I could work and save for my studies, I had to return to the farm – no luck."

Her uncle and aunt was 'foremen' on a neighbouring farm and offered her a job working in the vineyards. "I helped a bit with the admin of keeping the attendance documentation up to date, but had to be part of the team. I wasn't good with this physical work of pruning: it was cold and difficult and when I fell behind my cousin had to help me keep up."

“

Daar bestaan so 'n spangees tussen die werkgewer en werknemer, en ek glo, persoonlike groei aan albei kante. Ons beweeg nader aan mekaar en is nie meer so skaam om met mekaar te praat nie.

One evening she shared her frustrations with her aunt. “It wasn’t that I was scared of working, but I so desperately wanted to be a secretary.” They approached the owner for financial assistance to enable Cathy to study at the Worcester College. “Mr Coetzer was so eager to help me and in 1993 I enrolled for the trade secretarial certificate course (NQ level 4).” Following Cathy’s excellent first term results, Coetzer decided to turn the initial loan into a sponsorship. Casual weekend work at a local retailer covered her books and commuting expenses. Her return to the agricultural sector came when Johan

Naude (owner of Naudesia farm) offered Cathy office space to handle the administrative needs of the Workers’ Forum, formed when the Landelike Stigting (Rural Foundation) was disbanded. “Initially I knew very little about labour law, but through interaction with and training from Landelike Regstudies (Rural Legal Studies) I quickly learned about the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, ESTA and other issues influencing farm labourers.” Soon Cathy was also being chosen for different relevant committees like the Cancer Association and the school governing body.



• SEKRETARESSE •



However, she needed more permanency in terms of employment and in July 1998 Naudé appointed Cathy in a permanent position handling reception, wages, employment equity, and training and performance evaluation issues, working with seven farm supervisors.

In 2002 Naudesia was one of the first 36 farms to compete in the newly established Farm Worker of the Year Competition. The initial three categories (general worker, middle and junior management) excluded Cathy from competing, “but Mary Hane-kom from our farm won 3rd place that year,” says Cathy. “In 2003 I asked that they create a category for administrative workers on farms and in 2004 I could compete.” Cathy came second, but her determined personality had her coming back in 2005 for a win. Cathy’s tenacity to improve herself and her circumstances is grounded by a selfless drive to do the same for others.

After claiming 1st place in the regional competition, Cathy was forced to do a telephonic interview for the provincial level after her child was born a few days before the interviews were to be held at Elsen-

burg. Yet, even over the phone, she had no difficulty convincing the judges that the winner’s crown this year belonged to her. In 2009 she not only wins in her region, but also on provincial level!

“To be nominated on your farm is an honour, but winning the cash and a trophy simply puts you over the moon,” she enthuses. “Remember, the competition firstly pitches you against yourself: you are able to measure yourself and see where you can improve from the interview and the types of questions they ask. It can also alert you to opportunities and high-light areas where you might be in an unhealthy comfort zone.”

Some of Cathy’s most precious memories which were direct consequences of winning the competition, include being invited to the 2006 Female Farmer of the Year gala ceremony in Durban. “To experience such luxury and to fly for the first time made me so extremely happy,” she remembers. “Then the late Minister Dowry and former Premier, Ebrahim Rasool, invited me to deliver a speech at a women’s month event, followed later by an invitation from then Worcester mayor, Mr Charles Ntsomi!”





This competition definitely improved the image of the agri worker through every participant and winner that went home a changed man or woman.



Sharing her experience

“Every previous winner in the Hexriver Valley is called upon to give back in some way,” she says. “We not only encourage new farms to become involved, we also help prepare those that do enter. You know, even those who do not win has to have a speech ready – you have to be prepared for every circumstance.” According to Cathy new participants are initially very nervous. “But I tell them: just be yourself and talk about what you know best – your farm’s management had enough confidence to nominate you, now make them proud. I tell them to sit straight and to make eye-contact with the judges – then you’ll not feel so intimidated.”

“This competition, the judging process and the glamour of the consequent award function, is like the harvest after many years of hard work. Sometimes in winter it is hard work to prune the vineyards, but when you do it right, you’ll know that the harvest in January will be good.” Cathleen forms part of the judging at provincial level and the Prestige Agri Worker Forum.

Cathleen Beerwinkel has moved on. Although still surrounded by the vineyards of De Doorns, she now applies her skills as administrative officer at the Hex Valley Secondary School. However, it is the agricultural heart of this valley that has shaped her. ■



CHRISTO
SOMERS



DO MORE, BE MORE!

Christo Somers' first encounter with agriculture was from his sling-bound perch on his mother's back while she worked in the vineyard on a farm in the Piketberg area. She still likes to tell, when their family moved to town, how Christo worriedly asked, "How will we now be part of the harvest?"

It seems that agriculture wouldn't let him go. During school holidays Christo and his friends would find work at Broodkraal (a farm in Piketberg) and earn enough money for the holidays and to join the permanent workers for the seaside break after harvest

time - much to the envy of their friends. His natural aptitude for and interest in biology and science eventually led him to obtain a degree in microbiology and biochemistry at the University of the Western Cape. "My lecturer actually once again sparked my interest in agriculture when he alerted me to the possibilities that exist within the wine industry - seeing that I was already familiar with that environment, it made complete sense. Upon finishing my studies I was appointed by an agricultural research body and worked there for a year and a half on a contract basis."





“

Attending a splendid event like the prize giving gala for the first time, changes something in a person. To be able to sit at a stylishly laid table makes one feel important and extremely valued.

Hereafter Christo struggled to find work and for a while had to be satisfied with a weekly income of ±R300 earned at a bottling business. “Then in 2003 I applied at Riebeek Cellars (Riebeek Kasteel) and was offered my current position of laboratory technician. I soon realised that my particular personality and skills set make me the ideal candidate for this kind of lab work, as I thoroughly enjoy the methodical and analytical processes.”

Christo learned early on that he shares the responsibility of promoting agriculture amongst the youth. “We have to alert young people to the variety of careers within the sector, and we have to let them understand what it takes to make a success in this industry. Sure, there exists a certain measure of uncertainty about the future of agriculture in this country. We have to be realistic, yet positive about the opportunities. After all, we all have to eat!”

In 2010, the first year that the Swartland region took part in the competition, Christo entered in the category for junior managers. “My involvement in the cellar and the business side of things prepared me for the interview and although I thought I had a chance, I was really surprised to actually win.”

“One often feels that no one notices you, but this competition gives recognition where it is due,” he says. “The prizes are awesome, but the feedback regarding your contribution to the agricultural sector is priceless. It actually encourages us to do more, to be more! Participation in the competition also makes you consider the people who have helped to shape your career. I think of my parents’ determination to pay for my studies; of my science teacher who helped me to enrol at university; of Koot Nel who not only gave me holiday work, but also responsibilities and valuable exposure.”





Christo's prizes included a short course at the University of Stellenbosch, as well as an overseas trip to Germany. "I will never forget the first time I boarded an aeroplane – and then we flew no less than nine times during that one week!"

"I'm really pleased that the name of the competition was changed to Agri Worker of the Year," he says. "When I won in 2010 I was aware that this achievement opened the doors to others in secondary agriculture, but still the name of the competition was limiting and excluded certain categories."

Christo mentions that mingling with other entrants serves as a hatchery for new ideas as everyone freely shares their knowledge. "Someone who has come through the ranks has invaluable experience to share

with those younger than him or her."

He feels that there remains ways in which to improve the competition: "All regions should have a champion who actively drives the process. I know some regions has a forum that spreads the information and encourages farms to participate, but this should be standard procedure everywhere. No one should be deprived of the opportunity to enter."

"I've met so many people following my participation in the competition – some with qualifications and some with years of hands-on experience on the farms – and they have all contributed to broaden my insight into the sector. The competition has strengthened my overall optimistic view concerning the future of agriculture in South Africa." ■



JAFFIE
GALANT



TRAINER AT HEART

Jaffie Galant is the division manager of 100 hectares on the farm Bonaar in the Koue Bokkeveld, Ceres. Despite circumstances preventing him from finishing school, education and training has become part of his very fibre – initially with him on the receiving end, and later with him encouraging others to grab the opportunities for personal growth.

“You could say that agriculture has always been part of my makeup as a person,” he surmises. “Firstly I was born on Boplaas (from where the famous poet

Boerneef hails), my grandparents and parents were agri workers and consequently I helped out on the farm during holidays. I loved it – even when my only work was to pick up after the official picking teams in the orchards. I’d say my real interest started then and there.” Jaffie tried another avenue doing a stint as rack packer at the local co-operative, but the farm called him back.

“I started as a general worker, but that didn’t bother me – I knew farm work,” he says. “What made the

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Agri workers are often the face of agriculture. We are world-class people – the result of our handiwork is enjoyed the world over.

difference for me almost right from the start was the development opportunities that were being made available by the Landelike Stigting (Rural Development Agency) in the area.” Bronaar owner Hauptfleisch van der Merwe was one of the founders of this organisation and Jaffie benefited from the proximity of such a visionary man. “When I saw what was happening for people living on farms, I came back because I wanted to be part of this. The training programmes prompted me to never stagnate and the farm saw my potential and lifted me up further and further.” Jaffie grew in confidence and the relationship between employer and employee continually improved.

Jaffie became involved in and soon made progress as an instructor of the NPI training programme, even winning the national NPE competition for the best instructor. For a while this was his focus, but

during harvest time he would return to the farm. “After some three years doing training, I shifted my full attention back to the farm – this was where I was now needed. I was able to motivate my fellow workers who saw in me the possibilities that agriculture had for them in store.”

“Hauptfleisch recognised my need to make progress in my career,” Jaffie remembers. “When a division manager left, he consequently offered me the position and had the necessary training already lined up.” By 1995 Jaffie was in charge of 30 ha of apples and pears. “He took me by the hand and spared no effort for me to develop further. At Landelike Stigting meetings I was the only coloured attendee and although it was a bit uncomfortable initially, I soon realised that colour really did not matter. What matters is what is in you and what you want to achieve in life.”



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What matters is what is in you and
what you want to achieve in life.





BRONAR 09

BRONAR 09



“At that stage the relationship between the producer and his workers was really healthy. Sometimes I feel that politics has ruined some of that.”

Jaffie entered the competition in 2006 in the category for senior management. “Winning the competition gave me a platform to voice my opinions, to contribute towards the promotion of the positive image of agriculture and to meet others involved in this sector. You can’t know how it felt when the Minister of Agriculture brought us together to listen to us. People now knew who Jaffie was! You know, the man on the street now also talks about agriculture.” Jaffie reflects on the production tour for which his farm paid in 2007: “I experienced the way agriculture is practiced in Belgium, Italy and The Netherlands – oh, to see where our export products go!” On Bonaar the management team nominates the next year’s entrants for the management categories,

while the general workers nominate their colleagues. “Everyone who enters come to me for advice,” he says. “The main gist of my advice: be yourself and know what is going on around you. And they all come back from the interviews having made new friends and a purposefulness regarding their work.” Jaffie feels new categories for fields of farm work like workshop staff and truck drivers could be added to embrace the diversity of industries.

Jaffie speaks highly of the Prestige Agri Workers’ Forum – a body consisting of all previous over-all winners of the competition: “You could say that we help manage the competition; we give direction and serve as a mouth piece for the workers. We are making a contribution towards the future and growth of agri workers as a group and aim to continuously improve the image of agriculture.” ●



JAN
VAN WYK



Landbou maak my gelukkig en dankbaar.



NEVER TOO OLD TO LEARN

Meet Jan van Wyk, of the Mouton Valley Farm, Piket-Bo-Berg. Jan was a general worker when he was named overall winner in 2006. "It's not a cliché - it changed my life." Today he's on middle management level and, probably most importantly, a mentor for younger workers. "Yes, I'm a role model," he says unabashedly. "How can I not reach out to those coming up from the bottom, they need someone to look up to. Sure, agriculture is hard work, but I'm still here; I believe in this farm's management and I choose to focus on the positive things."

It is this spirit of optimism and the positive energy flowing from Jan that inspire other workers to be the best they can. But it wasn't always so. "I had to give up school in Grade 9 when my father, who also worked on this farm, became ill," he shares. "I was so inexperienced ... my first job was to plant trees. I was despondent, because things weren't working out as I expected." It was sheer determination, a spiritual turning point and people who believed in him, that made Jan realise he could do more; could be more. "One has to realise - sooner than later - that life does not owe you anything - what you make of your life depends solely on you," he fires. "You have a dream?"

You make it happen. There will always be people who are in a position to offer you a hand up – take it!” According to Jan his father was his first role model. “He wasn’t a learned man, but his conscientiousness regarding his work was an example I wanted to follow. On the farm, it was the manager, Jan van Zyl, who challenged me to achieve more in life. I learnt everything I know about farm work from him.”

The competition gave Jan an opportunity to test himself. “The process was hair-raising, but I was certain about my abilities and knew I only had to convey that to the judges. Through the questions asked by the panel, I could analyse myself, it made me consider new things related to my work.” It is evident that one of the benefits of the competition is that entrants inevitably discover more about themselves. “The competition also awakens a need to constantly improve yourself,” he adds. “I realised that if I could achieve this, I can reach the next level by having realistic goals and by using the training and other opportunities that are available.”

Upon asked about the competition’s contribution towards the improvement of relationships: “I feel that I’m appreciated,” he says. “Their acknowledgement has an effect on my attitude and also those of the workers around me. It brings management and employees closer together and we share in the celebration. We feel management do not begrudge us the limelight the competition brings – they are just as happy when we win.”

Limelight indeed!

The winners of this competition becomes celebrities in their various communities as neighbours, family and friends share in the glow and media hype following the award ceremony. “The community really expresses their pride in us. The win allows us to influence the lives of others – especially the youth. And one of the most important messages I want to convey is that without believing in yourself, you’ll never be able to face challenges or make the most of opportunities – and there are many!”

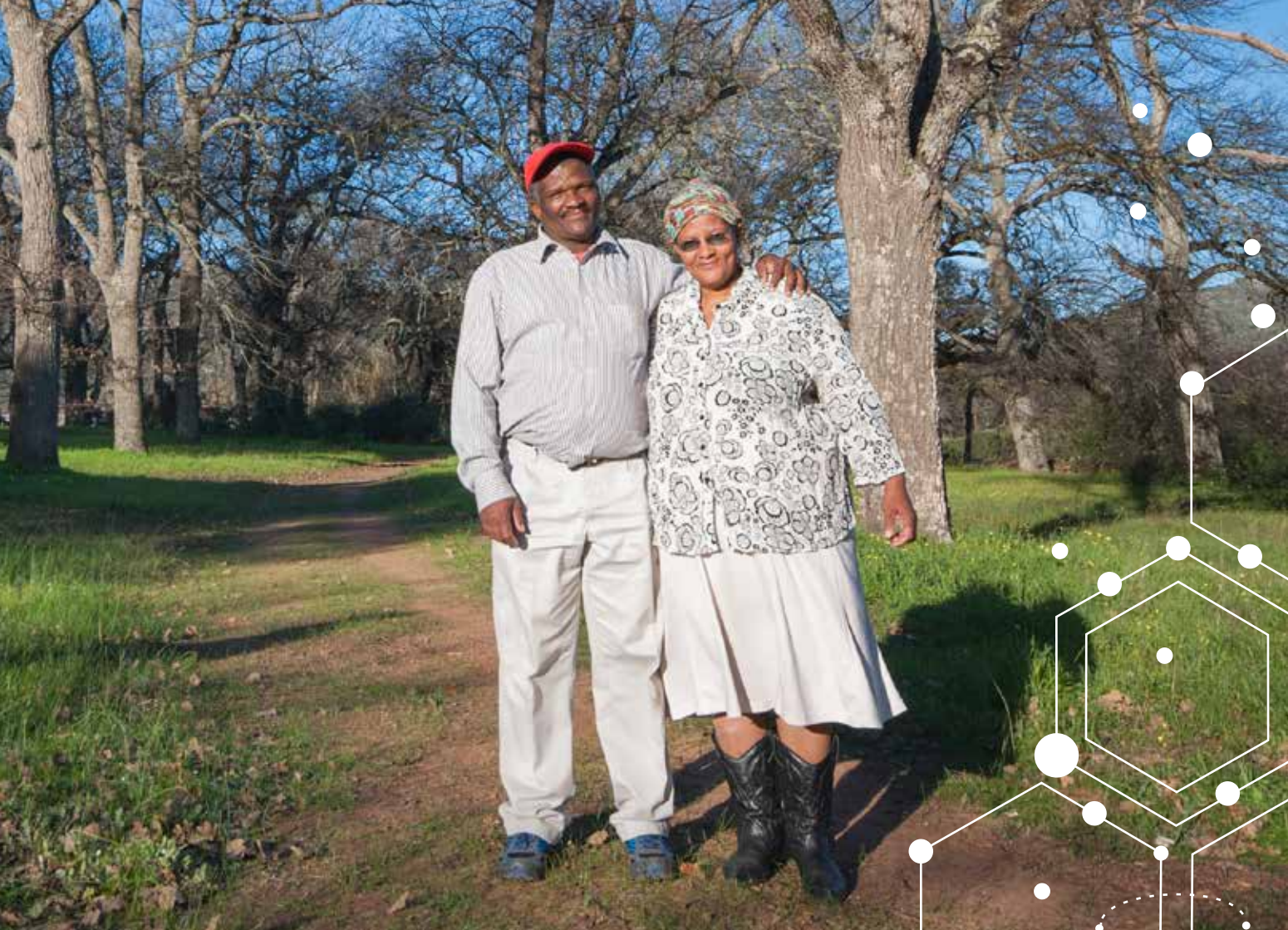




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For me the turning point came when management nominated me for this competition. They saw something in me that I wasn't aware of yet.





"I can tell young people with a clear conscience: agriculture is a wonderful career, but you have to equip yourself. Climb the staircase of success with training and work hard."

According to Jan the workers on their farm want to participate, "sometimes even at a higher level that they qualify for," he smiles. "With the competition structure you can clearly see why someone won - it is completely fair and transparent." Being the natural

mentor that he is, Jan gives advice to others wanting to enter. "Some are afraid that the questions would be too difficult. I tell them even if you fail you have to have the instinct of a boxer: if you lose, you get up, prepare for the next round and come back stronger, better prepared. Listen and learn!"

Jan (52) has spent the last 34 years making his contribution on Mouton Valley Farm. He is currently busy obtaining his matric. Why? "I do it for myself." ●



JEROME
THOMAS



THEN I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE VINE

At one stage the 37-year old Jerome Thomas, winner of the 2014 competition, wanted nothing to do with farm life. But life in town brought with it many temptations and eventually Jerome escaped back to the life he had known as a child. "For a year I was a casual worker on Kanonkop outside Stellenbosch," he says. "During that time I questioned those who have worked on the farm for a long time and soon realised that many feasible career possibilities existed. Growing frustrated with not being appointed on a permanent basis, Jerome took the bull by the horns, so to speak, and asked

for an appointment with the owner. "The next thing I knew was that they asked for my ID document and informed me that I would not be paid monthly. I was also chosen to lead the newly formed workers' committee."

Jerome has never shied away from asking hard questions and challenging the status quo. "But this is how I helped change the mind-sets of the workers. During our monthly meetings we kept everyone informed and found solutions to problems." The healthy relationship with the owner and the progress

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Op 'n stadium wou ek net 'n dorpsjapie wees!

made in the worker corps soon had Jerome serving on the management team. “Now I could get insight into the business side of things and give feedback to the workers.”

“Initially I asked a lot of questions and people might have thought that I’m arrogant, but I had to learn from those with experience and incorporate their knowledge into the more modern approach to farming,” he says. “And then I really fell in love with the vine and the work in the cellar.” Not even the long hot hours of harvest time seemed to be able to dampen his enthusiasm.

In 2008 Jerome entered the competition for the first time and won his category. “But I recognised the qualities necessary to be the overall winner – I now understood what it was actually all about.” The next time Jerome entered in 2014 he was ready. “Although I felt good about my final interview, I was hesitant to attend the award function,” he remembers. “The next day was our gospel festival and I still had such a lot to do. I started speculating about who would win, but the final announcement still came as a big surprise.”





“The competition, and especially the interviews, act as a hothouse where wonderful ideas are shared and hatched.





"At first I didn't hear them announce my name and then I was up on the stage and I simply knew what to say." Today people in agricultural circles know about Jerome and invite him to share his vision for the sector. "I've seen how attitudes change for the better when workers start winning their categories in this competition. They come back full of energy and the will to improve. They are no longer hesitant to share ideas and to ask questions." According to Jerome one of the drawbacks is that category winners vanish after the event. "These winners should continue to act as mentors and be involved in the judging process."

Although he was thankful for the significant prize he received, he surmises that the different category winners should ideally also receive prizes suited to their specific categories.

"One of the aims of the competition could be to assist winners to start their own businesses, whether it means to own land and farm, or to open a related

business." This seems to be one of Jerome's dreams ... no, more like a concrete objective towards which he is steadily working.

Membership of the Prestige Agri Worker Forum as one of the benefits related to winning the competition has opened many doors for him. "I've seen it carries weight when one of us desires an issue to be addressed on municipal or provincial level," he says. "Sometimes I just feel frustrated that we have a voice, but cannot implement solutions to some of the problems faced by those working on the farms." One of the viable solutions that Jerome is an advocate for is the establishment of an agricultural technical school for the children of agri workers. "These children often struggle with the academic side of schooling, but would excel in a more hands-on technical training environment which could better equip them for a career in agriculture."

"I will not stop serving this sector and these people." ●



JOSEPH
PLAATJES

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Die pryswenersfunksie! O, die glans, goeie kos, nuwe mense en ervarings ... wat 'n bederf!



THE GIVE-AND-TAKE OF LIFE ON A FARM

As with many others, the life of Joseph Plaatjies' agri worker father brought him to agriculture. "In the 80's my family moved from the Koo/Montague to the Graham Beck estate outside Robertson," Joseph shares. "The development that I saw here left no doubt in my mind that this was where I wanted to graft a career. There were (and still are) so many opportunities and the culture of this family business is to grow its people."

Joseph started out as a general farm worker. "You know, I wish young people would realise that there is absolutely nothing wrong with a career in agricul-

ture. No one has to end with a shovel in your hand - these is so much more," he says. "I spent my first five years doing general work (sometimes it is best to really understand a business from the bottom up), but then I started doing training courses - initially tractor and truck driving, and later irrigation and pesticide courses - and then moved to a supervisory level."

In 2008 Joseph entered and won the competition as a senior vineyard block manager. "The Becks saw my potential and nominated me for the competition." Joseph elaborates: "Management makes sure we all understand how we fit into the chain, in which direc-





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When one hasn't won, you know why not. A marathon can have only one winner, but next year you have another chance.

tion the farm is moving and how important everyone's contribution is. That makes you proud of your work and when you enter for this competition, you are able to sit in the interview with square shoulders and face the questions with confidence. The competition definitely brings management and workers closer together – you start seeing each other in a different light.”

His prize included a trip to France as part of an existing exchange programme between the Western Cape Department of Agriculture and the French government. When asked about this trip, Joseph do not mention the luxury of overseas travel as such, but enthuses about the value of experiencing the different agricultural practices of a foreign country.

A living competition

Joseph has definite recommendations to further improve the competition: “One of the current flaws is that the overall winner inevitably comes from the ranks of those in management positions. These are usually the people used to situations that expect them to communicate well, people who have benefited from more growth opportunities and who thus carry themselves confidently. And I understand that the winner should be someone who can stand in front of a crowd and share his views, but how can a tractor driver compete against a middle manager? Perhaps more emphasis on second and third places will serve as a solution.”





The recent change of the name of the competition sits well with Joseph: "Although the term Agri Worker of the Year feels fresh on the tongue, it will undoubtedly embrace a greater variety of people involved in the agricultural sector, and for young people it might erase some of the perceptions of the job still nestled in the past."

"Initially workers were hesitant to enter the competition," Joseph says. "But after I won, people were

inspired to do the same. I advise them to utilise all growth opportunities – no course, from first aid to something directly related to your current job, is ever wasted."

Joseph has given 26 years to the Graham Beck business. "The rewards are great, not just in financial terms, but especially in terms of my dignity and personal growth." And yes, a piece of soil to call his own remains his heart's desire... ●



KOLIE
PAULSE



FARMER FIRST AND FOREMOST

During a conversation with Karools (Kolie) Pause it is easy to forget that he is not the owner of Kweekkraal outside Citrusdal. As manager of this farm, one of the Mouton family's numerous farms, he runs the citrus operation with such a sense of pride and commitment that one could easily mistake him for the owner. Like many other children growing up on farms, Kolie followed in the footsteps of his agri worker parents. Upon leaving school he joined the Du Toit group in Ceres as a gen-

eral worker. Soon his drive to learn and improve his station, brought him promotion to such positions as tractor driver and irrigation specialist. Eventually the group made him increasingly responsible for certain of their operations, including the butchery and sheep farming operation in the Ceres Karoo, as well as their vegetable section. "I was climbing the ranks," he remembers, "next came junior team leader and then team leader."

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I love to farm! It has brought me to wonderful things. Of course there is serious pressure, but it's a great kind of pressure.

In 1989 Kolie and his wife moved to Citrusdal and he found employment with Johan Mouton, owner of Kweekkraal. “I realised then already that Johan was open-minded; he believed in developing his people and had even won the Farmer of the Year competition before,” Kolie says. “At that stage Kweekkraal was an unsuccessful farm and Johan asked me to turn it around for him. I wondered: is this purely a political move to make him look good, or was he giving me a chance, because I deserved it?” Kolie asked this question and the answer came: “If there's one person who can fix that mess, it's you.”

Within two years Kolie and his team had the farm turned around, well on its way to profitability. “I wanted Johan to be proud of this farm as it lies next to the N7 and people have to see we are doing things right.” Kolie's first mission was to unite the team of workers. “Naturally some of the people initially found it difficult to take leadership from me, but I knew we had to get the basics right before production would improve. I can farm hard, but my heart is soft towards people. I wasn't hesitant to discipline where necessary, but I drew them in by delegating responsibilities and making them part of the turn-around strategy.





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Laat ons vir onself praat! Moenie dink ons het nie 'n stem nie. Ons weet wat hier aangaan. Mense wat om die verkeerde redes namens ons wil praat, maak ons besigheid seer – moenie die boer kritiseer met 'n mond vol kos nie.

Today we all benefit from the prosperous operation – we improved production on this farm from 30 tons per hectare to an impressive 70 tons per hectare.”

“And yes there's stress, but not the unhealthy kind,” muses Kolie. “My day begins around 05:15 and I almost never leave before 20:00 – it just feels like my own farm.” Kolie smiles: “A previous girlfriend said I work like a machine, but agriculture is not simply my job, it's my life!”

In 2013 Kolie entered the senior manager category of the competition: “I wasn't competing against the others, solely against myself. I wanted to test myself in this way. My participation in the competition, winning the trophy and the overseas trip gave me a story to share. What excites me is that other farmers now ask us how we are so successful in integrating the different racial groups on all levels of the operation. The secret: we all love the land; we all love to farm.”

Visiting the Fruit Logistica showcase in Germany opened this farm manager's eyes to the global approach to producing, packing and exporting fruit. “Seeing the different cultivars of citrus and the high standards alerted me to what and how we have to produce to compete on such a level. I was tremendously impressed by the technological developments and innovative farming methods. The sky's the limit when it comes to technology for agriculture – oh, such opportunities exist!”

Farmers often invite Kolie to talk to their workers or at farmers' days. “Remember, the competition would have meant nothing if I wasn't a good farmer.”





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I like taking people with me on this journey on the farm. I cannot do it alone. When I started at Kweekkraal we had to agree on certain principles regarding production and discipline; the result is a mean team which fires on all cylinders.

About the competition and its strengths and weaknesses Kolie has various opinions: “It would have been wonderful if it could expand beyond the borders of the Western Cape so that others could also benefit from the growth opportunities locked up in the competition. Also, I feel the different sectors, all with their own agricultural competitions, should try to unite more – maybe it’s possible to create one provincial or even national platform for everyone involved in agriculture to compete. For example, why should middle and senior level managers of the different racial groupings compete in different competitions?”

“The name change has come at the right time, but we’ll have to ‘talk’ it. I know it will take time for everyone to get used to it, but the name ‘agri worker’ is so much more inclusive.”

57-Year old Kolie Paulse is excited about agriculture and the possibilities which exist for people like him. “There’s such hope in the sector. I feel the image of agriculture is changing and more and more young people consider it as a viable career option. For me, if there was a possibility for my own farm, I would grab it – but nowhere else than the Western Cape!” ●



RITA
ANDREAS



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

The story of Rita Andreas' life reminds one of a fairy tale. Born to farm worker parents on the farm Leliefontein in Wellington, Rita's roots are fixed firmly to the land and its people. "Two families have toiled on this farm for generations: the Bosman's (owners) and the Appolo's of which I'm the 5th generation," she shares. The healthy relationship between their families created a space for Rita to grow in and now she's giving back abundantly.

Rita joined the workforce at an early age, "During that time we took it almost for granted that we

would start our career on the farm. I started right at the bottom as a general worker, working in the vineyards, including pruning, planting and grafting vines. In 2002 I was offered my first admin position," and then there was no stopping her. After a mere 3 months she was promoted to personnel manager and soon after Rita was the farm's senior personnel manager.

According to Rita the Bosman's contribution to farm worker empowerment started long before 1994. "Yes, it was tough! Suddenly this Coloured farm girl

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I'd very much like to represent the agri workers right there in Parliament!

had to handle the disciplinary actions of even her white co-workers.”

In 2007, when the Bosman family took empowerment to the next level and offered the workers shares in the business, Rita played a pivotal role in training and guiding the group towards an understanding of the process. “A new mind-set had to be developed to understand the long-term nature of the agreement.” Currently the workers own 30% of the total package – including the main farm and nursery.

In 2009 the Bosman's entered Rita for the competition on middle manager level and she won the overall trophy. “My career changed significantly,” she says. “Suddenly everyone knew about you and asked me to act as motivational speaker at a variety of events. My family also had to adapt to the long hours I now spent – especially in the evenings – helping people on farms where the circumstances still had to change.”

“In 2011 I asked the Lord to use me on a wider level. I felt I've helped to raise the bar on our own farm, and based on the growth and exposure I experienced following the competition, I was now ready to help improve the living and working conditions of others.” The agri worker strikes of 2012/2013 created this platform for Rita to step forward. “Every evening when I was watching the news, I realised agri workers had no platform where they could express our needs or frustrations. I also knew that what the world was seeing was not a true picture of our people – there were other forces at work.” Rita's answer to this upheaval that threatened the relationships on farms was the creation of a National Agri Workers Forum where agri workers and producers proactively worked on restoring the relationship. Today this forum has more than 14 700 members and keeps Rita extremely busy.







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Ek sou so graag wou sien dat 'n kompetisie van hierdie kaliber op 'n nasionale vlak 'n werklikheid raak.



Rita has since moved on from her permanent position on the farm to a position in Rural Development at the local Drakenstein Municipality (but remains the chairperson of the workers' trust, as well as a director of the company). "Farm work has always been my passion. The empowerment and networking I've experienced as a result of the competition gave me a platform to make a difference on a wid-

er level. I have such respect for agri workers and I'll never think myself above them." Rita's stature has grown in the eyes of her community but also at a political level. A few years ago one would already have spotted her name on the short list for the provincial Minister of Agriculture and following the recent municipal elections, Rita is as active as ever in her position of changing the lives of especially agri workers. ●



SAGEAS
MCKENNA



FEATHERS GALORE!

Agriculture, and more specifically the farm of ostrich producer Saag Jonker, is intimately woven into the life story of Sageas McKenna. Almost 35 years have passed since Sageas was born on Kamanassie, a farm in the Oudsthoorn region. Here his father also worked and Sageas gained exposure to the different career options available in agriculture.

Upon completion of his schooling, he completed a two-year course in financial management and immediately returned to the farm in 2000 – initially as data

processor, then creditors' clerk, junior bookkeeper and finally as manager of the feathers division of this thriving company (a position he still holds today).

A peek into the scope of the company's feathers division, gives one a clear idea of the measure of responsibility Sageas carries. Some 40,000 to 50,000 ostriches are slaughtered every year. Chicks are first plucked at the age of five months and again when slaughtered. "All feathers come to my department and our team dries, sorts and sizes the feathers according to types, length and quality.





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The competition is evolving at a steady pace. Change is good, but something too drastic might cause the agri worker to dissociate with it.

Hereafter it is readied and packed for the export market.” His section annually handles 40 to 50 tons of feathers. “Our feathers are shipped to China and the Middle East for the production of feather dusters, to various leading European fashion houses (think boas and evening dresses), and to Brazil for those extravagant carnival costumes.”

Sageas manages no less than 142 people. “Our section has to process feathers for anywhere from 18 to 38 destinations on a daily basis,” he says. “We are experiencing the consequences of the bird flu pandemic that severely impacted the ostrich industry over the past few years. Less ostriches means fewer feathers and consequently our product fetches high prices at the auctions.” Sageas has a gleam in his eye when he speaks about his feeling of pride when he

watches the fashion channel on TV and sees their feathers around the necks of world-famous models or in the streets of Brazil or Rio.

Sageas initially entered the competition in the category for administrative workers, but it was only when he entered on senior managerial level in 2011 that the overall prize was his. “Winning has broadened my horizons. I’ve met ministers, I travelled overseas and learnt to adapt to new and challenging circumstances. The exposure forced me – in a kind way – to grow in many ways. And for others my achievement served as motivation that they could do the same. This gave me an opportunity to show young people that working on a farm is not what it was twenty years ago – you can indeed be proud to work on a farm.”





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Ek het nooit daarvan gehou dat mense 'n plaaswerker sien bloot as 'n omie met 'n blou oorpak en laphoed nie. Die kompetisie het duidelik kom wys dat 'n plaaswerker 'n wye verskeidenheid pligte kan hê en ook gegradueerde mense kan insluit.

According to Sageas participation in the competition changes people radically. “Suddenly everyone is watching you and listening to what you have to say – you have to set an example.” Another benefit of the competition is the improvement of the relationship between employer and employee: “There’s definitely more dialogue, and a deeper understanding of each other’s challenges and realities. And of course having one of his employees win the competition is a feather in the cap (excuse the pun) of any producer – it must be wonderful to know you have the best in a certain category right here on your farm.”

Many young job seekers find their way to Sageas’ section. “I try to show them that working hard and diligently will inevitably bring great rewards,” he says. “I teach them that you are responsible to continuously improve yourself if you do not want to stagnate and be left behind. You have to raise your hand when opportunities arise. You have to make sure that people notice you for all the right reasons.” Sageas is enthusiastic about the future of agriculture and his part in it. “There will always be scope for improvement in terms of employment, but who knows, perhaps I would eventually consider starting my own business. The opportunities within agriculture are endless.” ●



WIMPIE
PAULSE



NOT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT YOUR INNER DRIVE

For the past four years Wimpey Paulse, overall winner of the 2012 competition, is the human resources manager for the Graaff Fruit group outside Ceres. It may seem that his current stature is far removed from the realities faced by farm workers, but Wimpey's past has in fact prepared him for a time like this. A child of agri worker parents, Wimpey grew up on the farm Kromfontein in the Koue Bokkeveld. As a result of his conscientious focus on his schoolwork, the farm owners enabled him to enrol for a BCom degree at the University of the Western Cape. Unfortunately the political unrest of 1980-1983 had him return to the farm prematurely.

From here his career took off. First as a clerk at the De Keur Estate and later, following various training courses, including short courses in Management Development and a Diploma in Personnel Management, as an accountant and financial manager for the Rietfontein Estate. When Robert Graaff bought Rietfontein, he entrusted the position of Human Resources Manager to Wimpey. "I really have insight into the agri workers' realities," he shares. "I am able to look out for the economic interests of the company, but simultaneously use my background to the benefit of the workers."

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I never want to reach a point where I imagine that I've now learnt or achieved it all.

It was still in his position as financial manager of Rietfontein that he won the senior management category and became the overall winner of the 2012 competition. “Most of the participants were still from the production side of farming,” he remembers. Since then the organisers of the competition has deemed it best to remove the category for senior managers. Wimpie agrees that this was for the best: “People, who find themselves in senior management positions on farms, should participate in the national Young Farmer of the Year competition or such.”

“The greatest value of the competition obviously does not only lie in the exposure of visiting a different city or to fly to an overseas destination. For us to be able to network with others across the province and the direct access that we have to the Minister

of Agriculture and other government structures, and the ability to make a difference, is absolutely wonderful.”

According to Wimpie the competition took him out of his comfort zone. “Every winner needs to make a paradigm shift. Suddenly it is no longer good enough to remain standing in the quiet corner during a function; you cannot hide behind the fact that you're disadvantaged or from the farm – you have to use the voice you received when winning this competition.” About their participation at the Prestige Agri Worker Forum Wimpie says that he values the opportunity to learn from those from other regions and other agricultural industries. “We can hear what the Minister is worried about; we are continuously exposed to new learning opportunities. You know,







graaff packing

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Dis nie 'n skande om 'n plaaswerker te wees nie, maar probeer net om soveel opleiding moontlik te kry sodat jy opsies kan hê.
Niemand mag neerkyk op hierdie werk nie – almal moet tog eet!



the competition enables us to benchmark against others in similar positions – not only in terms of skills levels, but even in terms of social exposure.”

About the name change, “I’ve never had a problem with the name ‘farm worker’,” he says. “But the name of agri worker is undoubtedly more all-encompassing to include secondary sectors and even pack stores and more.” Wimpie has other ideas about ways to still further improve the competition: “I feel the organisers could place more emphasis on the various category winners instead of crowning an overall winner. Associated companies could show their support by sponsoring prizes that relate directly to the specific category.” One of the other pitfalls he highlights, is the fact that participants who are not efficient communicators, often falls out. “Someone could be brilliant in his job, but if he cannot share

this during an interview, it’s difficult for the judges to effectively compare him with the others. It would be wonderful if people could be evaluated in their workplace, on their own turf.”

“I’ve always believed that your circumstances do not have to define you for the rest of your life. I believe in seizing opportunities for growth that comes your way. And now I’ve saddled a wild horse,” he grins. “I’ve registered for an MBA with the Business School of the Netherlands. It is simply a box towards self-actualisation that I’ve not yet ticked.”

Wimpie’s humility and the level of gravity with which he accepts his role as role model, makes one grateful on behalf of every young person who benefit from his wisdom and insight. ●



IN MEMORIAM
MARIA MALAN



A LIFE IN SERVICE

Maria Petronella Sila Malan's life goal was to get a fair deal for her fellow rural workers and to promote a sense of personal responsibility amongst them. Unfortunately her lifeline was cut short much too early when she passed away on 9 April 2010 at the age of 60. Despite the heights she achieved, she remained warm, down-to-earth and completely accessible to the community she served.

Maria's life is exemplary of how an unfortunate change of direction can amount to great things. Although her chosen career was that of nursing, eco-

nomic pressures experienced by her family, forced her to immediately start earning an income and the first option was that of domestic worker on the vegetable farm, Uitkyk near Klawer, and soon after she was transferred to general farm work.

In 1989 a tragedy changed the course of her life as well as the direction of others involved in the farming operation and the wider community. A truck carrying agri workers and driven by Smit Rossouw, one of the owners, overturned on the Krantz kop Bridge and crashed into the river below. Fifty-three people were

killed, including Smit Rossouw. Maria, as a member of the Krantzkop Bridge Disaster Committee, played a major supportive and leadership role in the sad aftermath.

Maria's valuable input was noted and when the Rossouw family switched to table and wine grape farming, she was elected for a farm supervisor's course at Boskop College. Shortly after she was appointed supervisor of table grape production, she became the farm manager in charge of table grape production, supervising up to 200 workers during the season. In 2004 Maria completed a 2-year course in table grape production at Elsenburg Agricultural College, only the second woman and first historically disadvantaged woman to do so.

With a particular passion for the plight and empowerment of women, Maria's community and political resume gives testimony to her life mission: chairperson of the Trawal community committee, councillor for the West Coast District Council, vice-chair of the Local and District Transformation committee, and more. On managerial level she was a Stellar Winery board member, and a Waitrose Foundation board member.

Maria's prowess was providentially not indefinitely limited to her immediate surroundings. She was intimately involved in the Fairtrade accreditation pro-

cess of Stellar Farming and when the Stellar Winery followed suit a year later, Maria became the first chairperson of the Stellar Employees' Trust Joint Body, the executive arm of the Trust. The Exco is tasked with managing Fairtrade Premium Funds, initiating and managing community projects and ensuring that the beneficiaries of the Premiums are educated and informed about Fairtrade and the projects. Maria soon spread her wings abroad as a Fairtrade ambassador for Stellar, travelling to Europe and the United Kingdom on numerous occasions to represent the company as well as South African Fairtrade workers.

The crown on a person's success is more often ascribed to personal development than mere position. In Maria's case the recognition of her peers and the greater agricultural community brought her much joy. In 2008 Stellar Farming won the Rudnet Farm Health Awards based on her input and in 2009 Maria was chosen as the Overall Farm Worker of the Year. Learning to speak and write English and Xhosa, gaining her drivers' licence at a mature age, and becoming accustomed to public speaking and being associating with high-powered audiences, including the press, was simply the cherry on it all.

Maria Malan, a life dedicated to servant leadership. We salute you! ●





CHARLENE NIEUWOUDT

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The evolution of the competition clearly mirrors the progress made in terms of nation building, and it highlights the course-changing impact of visionary individuals.

It is also steadily, but surely shaping a new perception regarding a group of people who has for generations been making an invaluable contribution to agriculture – albeit labelled under the somewhat derogatory generalist term of ‘farm worker’.

A conversation with the thirteen overall winners has not only brought home for me the exciting spectrum of work covered by the term 'agri worker', but has triggered a new level of pride for the diversity of people forming this rainbow nation of ours – and especially those setting the scene in agriculture.

The combined strengths evident in these winners give one a good idea of the character of a leading agri worker:

- Cathleen's quiet determination to realise her dream.
- Wimpie's resolve never to stop learning.
- Sageas' unwavering stance in the face of large-scale commercial responsibility.
- Rita's drive to let others benefit from her personal growth.
- Joseph's gratitude towards producers who make a difference.
- Jan's compassionate approach to mentoring the youth.
- Alex's optimism about agriculture in South Africa.
- Antonie's wisdom in dealing with the realities of the past, while looking forward with great hope.
- Christo's security based on experience and exposure.
- Jerome's youthful energy.
- Kolie's bursting farmer's heart.
- Jaffie's resolute contribution to the development of agri workers, and
- Andre's ability to address issues with a strong, yet humble voice.

My challenge to the readers of this book: continue to listen to others with a large measure of tolerance and compassion, and with the aim to further narrow the divide. ■

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Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation.

It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

Nelson Mandela
Long Walk to Freedom