

# ABUNDANT HARVEST

Women at Work



Western Cape  
Government  
Agriculture

BETTER TOGETHER.

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# ABUNDANT HARVEST

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Women at Work

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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5	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> Joyene Isaacs	57	<b>JACKY GOLIATH</b> De Fynne - a fine example of success
7	<b>FOREWORD</b> Minister Alan Winde	63	<b>JEANNE GROENEWALD</b> No spring chicken to business
8	<b>DAFF FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS PROGRAMME</b>	69	<b>LESLIE MCGREGOR</b> Herbs galore
10	<b>RECOGNISING WESTERN CAPE FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS OVER THE YEARS</b>	75	<b>LIZ EGLINGTON</b> Nature's healing power
15	<b>ADELE HATTINGH</b> Abalone farming to save the oceans	81	<b>NAOMI MULLER</b> A 180° change of direction
21	<b>ALISON NOTLEY</b> Fibre of the Inca gods	87	<b>NOMONDE KWEZA</b> Agriculture in her blood
27	<b>CAROLE KIRKWOOD-PRETORIUS</b> I had a farm in Africa	93	<b>RENI HILDENBRAND</b> Luxurious liquids
33	<b>DORET SMIT</b> Teamwork does it best	99	<b>TENJIWE CHRISTINA KABA</b> Township greens
39	<b>GESIE VAN DEVENTER</b> Farmer with a heart for her community	105	<b>WADEA JAPPIE</b> Not all your eggs in one basket
45	<b>ILSE RUTHFORD</b> A company with heart	111	<b>AUTHOR'S NOTES</b> Charlene Nieuwoudt
51	<b>INGRID DE WAAL</b> Purple hues of success		









# INTRODUCTION

Joyene Isaacs, Head of Department

A title depicts a status, a position in a structured environment, a perception and a reality. So what does this edition of the Abundant Harvest series reflect? Well, for the agricultural sector, a number of important highlights are depicted and it challenges the conventional (and traditional?) thinking and perceptions pertaining to women in general and women specifically linked to the sector.

There are 5 key highlights (and I'm sure there are many more) that should be mentioned in relation to women in particular and specifically linked to the agricultural sector:

1. Constitution
2. Government
3. Sector
4. Community
5. Individual.

The Constitution 'instructs' Government on gender equality, and also emphasise the importance of women in all spheres of the community. This book highlights the efforts made to ensure that women obtain their rightful place(s). This is at implementation and service delivery level to women in the agricultural sector.

Government takes its instruction from the Constitution, and each Accounting Officer, whether

a provincial or national government department, is held accountable for the 8 principle action plan issued by the Ministry for Public Service and Administration (MPSA). This charter deals with the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality for the Public Sector (and for the citizenry).

Transformation in the agricultural sector is required at many levels, and the focus of this publication is on the women at work in the sector. The argument is always more is needed (and I agree), but let's celebrate the women in the sector now, and showcase the absolute brilliant outputs and create role models for our younger generation of women.

The women in this book operate at community level and their generosity and commitment to make a difference to communities can but only be applauded. The communities they hail from should be proud of them. 'She is one of us' should be the song going forward.

Last, but not least the woman as an individual should be respected, applauded and supported to take her agri-business to a next level, not to compete with men, but to show that women can and do well in the sector. With the opportunities created by Government, such as the DAFF Female Entrepreneur Awards programme and women in the sector encouraged to participate, we can grow the sector better together. ●





# FOREWORD

Minister Alan Winde, Western Cape Minister  
of Economic Opportunities

In this edition of the Abundant Harvest, we are celebrating the ambassadors of the Western Cape's agriculture sector.

Women play a vital role in every aspect of this country's agriculture sector, as showcased by this publication. Through determination and commitment, they are playing a meaningful role in the economy. Locally, they contribute to food security and job creation. Internationally, they are at the forefront of producing high-quality exports for key strategic markets.

These inspiring stories illustrate the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of the women in the Western Cape's agriculture sector. Their efforts have received national recognition, clinching top spots at the country's agricultural awards.

Globally, they are putting South Africa on the map in fast-growing and lucrative industries such as horse and wine exports.

The women profiled in this publication are our valuable partners in achieving the goals we have set aimed at growing this province's economy. Our Project Khulisa growth strategy has identified agri-processing as a key sector for the next five years. To this end, Agriculture, through its backward link with agri-processing, will be an important focus area.

It is my hope that the inspiring stories of the women profiled here will encourage more women and young people to enter this sector. ●





# DAFF FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS PROGRAMME

The DAFF Female Entrepreneur Awards Programme is a joint effort between the National Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), provincial departments of agriculture and the private sector.

The programme seeks to acknowledge, encourage and increase the participation of women, young women and women with disabilities in the sector. It rewards the efforts and contribution of women in food security, job creation, economic growth and poverty alleviation. Over the years it has become an empowerment platform that recognises the entrepreneurial skills of women, youth and women with disabilities in the sector.

Ultimately the goal of the programme is to leverage women from subsistence- and small holder producers to commercial entrepreneurs who also venture into export markets.

The award ceremony takes place every year in August - Women's Month, in commemoration of strides and milestones towards sector transformation and gender mainstreaming. By winning this competition on a provincial level, the women go on to compete nationally. This initiative aims to leverage female entrepreneurs from being subsistence and smallholder producers to producing for commercial and export markets.

This competition offers the ideal platform to acknowledge and encourage all women in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sector, and for female entrepreneurs to motivate and inspire other women across career borders. In a world where women deserve and are receiving more recognition for their contribution to the promotion of the complete community, this initiative serves as an instrument that should be supported by all women.





## The competition recognises women in the following categories across the 3 sectors: Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

- **Best Female Worker:** recognises outstanding service in the sector by a general worker
- **Best Subsistence Producer:** caters only for beginners within the sector
- **Top Entrepreneur Smallholder:** the enterprise must demonstrate the actual activities which have been in progress for a year and longer
- **Top Entrepreneur Processing:** entrepreneurs are allowed to enter even if they are not producing what they are processing, however, they must demonstrate the actual processing activities which have been in progress for a year and longer
- **Top Entrepreneur Commercial:** the enterprise must demonstrate the actual activities which have been in progress for a year and longer. The group/individual should have defined membership and role(s) within a properly constituted and registered entity
- **Top Entrepreneur Export Markets:** the enterprise must be producing for export markets with products distributed across provincial boundaries and international outlets
- **Ministerial Special Award/s:** this category awards recognition to an outstanding young entrepreneur and/or a woman with a disability. The Provincial Minister exercises his/her prerogative to select the outstanding entrepreneur

Category winners of the provincial competitions then compete at national level and are awarded for their contribution at a Gala event which is hosted by DAFF in partnership with the host province and sponsors.

At this level national winners in all the categories are chosen as well as an overall National winner. Both provincial and national winners walk away with substantial cash prizes and training opportunities.

TotalSA has been a major sponsor of the National competition over the past years.

Details of the competition in terms of criteria and nomination forms can be found online at:  
[www.elsenburg.com](http://www.elsenburg.com)

Or interested parties can email a request for more information to:  
[info@elsenburg.com](mailto:info@elsenburg.com).





# RECOGNISING WESTERN CAPE FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR WINNERS OVER THE YEARS



**2000**

**Top Exporter**

Ida du Toit – deceased

**Top Producer for National Markets**

Rina Theron  
*Aan Het Berg - Leipoldville*

**Top Producer for Informal Markets**

Stephanie Groenewald  
*Swellendam*

**National Winner**

Rina Theron  
*Top producer for National markets*

**2001**

**Top Exporter**

Mary Spies  
*Swellendam*

**Top Producer for National Markets**

Reni Hildenbrand  
*Wellington*

**Top Producer for Informal Use**

Cathe McLennan  
*Esperance Farm - Riviersonderend*



## 2002

### Top Exporter

Helena le Roux  
*Werda - De Doorns*

### Top Producer for National Markets

Gesie van Deventer  
*Domaine Brahms - Paarl*

### Top Producer for Household Use

Evelyn Thysse  
*Haarlem*

## 2003

### Top Exporter

Gesie van Deventer  
*Domaine Brahms - Paarl*

### Top Producer for National Markets

Leslie McGregor  
*Riverdowns - Paarl*

### Top Producer for Informal Markets

Annie van As  
*Laingsburg*

### Top Producer for Household Use

Elsie Sineli - Nonkululeko Project  
*Gugulethu*

## 2004

### Top Producer for National Markets

Doret Smit  
*Wilge Fontein - Laingsburg*

### Top Producer for Informal Markets

Gertruida Lambert  
*Hansmelkkraal - Mamre*

### Top Producer for Household Use

Sweetness Mzolisa  
*Khayelitsha*

### National Winner

Doret Smit  
*Young Aspirant Farmer*

## 2005

### Top Exporter

Suraya Cassiem  
*Pacaltsdorp - George*

### Top Producer for National Markets

Liz Eglington  
*Cape Town*

### Top Producer for Informal Markets

Janine Wessels  
*Somerset West*

### Top Producer for Household Use

Masithandane Garden Project  
*Gugulethu*





## 2006

### Top Exporter

Eurica Scholtz  
*Windmeul - Paarl*

### Top Producer for National Markets

Jeanne Groenewald  
*Elgin*

### Top Producer for Informal Markets

Wadea Jappie  
*Cape Town*

### Top Producer for Household Use

Masikhulisane Vegetable Project  
(Nomathemba Regina Shiceka) - *Guguletu*

### National Winner

Jeanne Groenewald  
*Top Producer for National Markets*

## 2007

### Top Exporter

Janice Jamieson - deceased  
*Montagu*

### Top Producer for National Markets

Sonja Ferreira  
*Oudtshoorn*

### Top Producer for Informal Markets

Zola Organic Farming Project (Margaret Mtomile)  
*Zwelihle Township - Hermanus*

### Top Producer for Household Use

Masivuke Community Project (Peggy Kal)  
*Khayelitsha*

### National Winner

Sonja Ferreira  
*Top Producer for National Markets*

## 2008

### Top Producer for National Markets

Marinda du Plessis  
*Caledon*

### Top Producer for Informal Markets

Nontembeko Snell  
(Vukuzenzele Community Nursery) - *Kleinmond*

### Top Producer for Household Use

Gloria Bebeza (Khumbulani Project)  
*Khayelitsha*

## 2009

### Top Exporter

Naomi Muller - Shabach Arabian Stud  
*Hermanus*

### Top Producer for National Markets

Alpine Goats cheese - Jacqueline Wellenmann &  
Brenda Shelly - *Napier*

### Top Producer for Informal Markets

Doreen Smal  
*Caledon*

### Household Markets - Communal Garden

Masizizamele Garden Project  
*Grabouw*

### Household Use - Backyard Garden

Katrina Cedras  
*Murraysburg*



## 2010

### Top Exporter – Crops & Horticulture

Gesie van Deventer  
*Domaine Brahms - Paarl*

### Top Exporter – Fisheries

Adelé Hattingh  
*Gansbaai*

### Top Commercial Processor

Jacolise Botes - deceased  
*Prins Albert*

### Top Entrepreneur: Smallholder Horticulture & Crops

Wadea Jappie  
*Cape Town*

### Top Entrepreneur: Smallholder Livestock

Alison Notley  
*Villiersdorp*

### Top Entrepreneur: Smallholder Forestry

Caroline de Villiers  
*Elgin*

### Top Entrepreneur: Smallholder Processor

Siyazama Womens Business Trust  
*(Nontuthuzela Gertrude Mbalo) - Tyger Park*

### Best Subsistence Producer

Nosakhele Food Garden  
*(Nomtombana Victoria Mtshengu) - Khayelitsha*

### Best Female Worker – Fisheries

Bolekwa Nyantsa  
*Hermanus*

### National Winner

Adelé Hattingh  
*Top Exporter Fisheries*

## 2011

### Top Exporter

Adri Claassen  
*Hermanus*

### Top Commercial Producer

Jacky Goliath  
*Stellenbosch*

### Best Small Holder

Allie Gordon  
*Kranskraal - Leeu Gamka*

### Best Processor

Doreen van Riel  
*Caledon*

### Best Subsistence Producer

Masiphile Peace Project (Nobantu Gwabeni)  
*Khayelitsha*

### Best Female Worker

Elize Meyer  
*Rietfontein - Koue Bokkeveld*

### National Winner

Jacky Goliath  
*Top Commercial Producer*

## 2013

### Top Entrepreneur Commercial

Joretha Grib  
*Jansekraal - Citrusdal*

### Top Entrepreneur Smallholder

Carole Kirkwood-Pretorius  
*Avontuur - Ceres*

### Best Subsistence Producer

Ntinga Community Garden (Nomxolisi Mdyeshana)  
*Khayelitsha*

### National Winner

Praline Swart  
*Special Ministerial Award for Youth*



## 2014

### Best Female Worker

Claudie Daniels  
*Stellenbosch*

### Best Subsistence Producer

Nomonde Kweza (Ulimo Lwethu Food Garden)  
*Khayelitsha*

### Top Entrepreneur: Smallholder

Eleanore Swart  
*Bot River*

### Top Entrepreneur: Processing

Ilse Ruthford  
*Stellenbosch*

### Top Entrepreneur: Commercial

Jeanne Groenewald  
*Elgin*

### Ministerial Special Award for Youth

Samantha Smiles  
*Elim*

### National Winner

Ilse Ruthford  
*Top Entrepreneur Processing*

## 2015

### Best Female Worker

Maria Persens  
*Klapmuts*

### Best Subsistence Producer

Moya We Khaya Community Garden  
(Tenjiwe Christina Kaba) - *Khayelitsha*

### Top Entrepreneur: Smallholder

Eugene Simons  
*Firgrove*

### Top Entrepreneur: Processing

Jessica Bonin  
*Cape Town*

### Provincial Nominee: Commercial

Ingrid de Waal  
*Stellenbosch*

### Ministerial Special Award for Youth

Geraldine Theunissen  
*Bot River*

### National Winner

Tenjiwe Christina Kaba  
Moya We Khaya Community Garden - *Khayelitsha*  
*Best Subsistence Producer*





**Adelé  
Hattingh**

2010 National Winner: Top Exporter Fisheries





## ABALONE FARMING TO SAVE THE OCEANS

Because of people like Adelé Hattingh our children's children will still be able to enjoy abalone in years to come. This delicacy from the depths of the ocean are facing extinction in its natural habitat due to the persistent raiding by poachers. In an answer to this dire situation, companies like Aquunion are farming these animals on land.

Adelé, Aquunion's quality assurance manager for their abalone farms, once harboured little girl dreams of becoming a vet. Upon meeting a lecturer in marine

biology at the University of Port Elizabeth, her love of the sea was rekindled and her career course was set on getting to know the oceans better. "During my honours degree year the abalone industry gained attention and I worked at a project in Port Elizabeth," she says. "Aquaculture interested me immensely; however, my master's degree took me to the West Coast to work on a fisheries bi-catch programme whereby we focused on obtaining markets for the variety of fish caught as bycatch with hake - fish that were previously simply disposed of."



In order to give an indication of the scope of current volumes and Adelé's consequent range of responsibility: Aquunion weekly exports between 6 to 8 tons of canned, live, frozen and dried abalone to such countries as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore.

An opportunity to work as production manager at an abalone farm in Stompneus Bay drew her attention where she spent four years getting acquainted with this exciting fledgling industry. Sadly she was retrenched after the continuous occurrence of red tide stopped this company from exporting any produce for an entire year.

Fortunately André du Plessis, who basically started the abalone industry, as we know it today, appointed her as research and development manager. "I learnt so much from him and did research on how to improve abalone farming systems and growth rates". Five years later I was appointed farm manager of our newly acquired farm in Gansbaai." Here Adelé was able to up production from the initial 90 tons a year to the current 200 tons and an estimated 240

tons next year. "I really enjoyed building up the infrastructure there, improving systems, training staff and delivering results which convinced investors to consider this as a viable investment option."

During the middle of 2015 Adelé was called back to the main farm in Hermanus as the quality assurance manager. "Due to the rapid expansion of the company, with a new farm on the West Coast added to the fold, it has become vital to develop, improve and institute standard operating procedures and to train staff to work with these new systems." She is also responsible for attaining the proper accreditation in terms of HACCP and GLOBAL G.A.P for all the farms. "Although we mainly export to the East, our customers are increasingly considering the issues of sustainability, accreditation and food safety."







According to Adelé this industry is still very much a man's world. Women are indeed valued in the hatcheries for their attention to detail and the focus needed to work with the baby animals, but in the top structures you'll not find many. "Aqunion is different: here we have prominent women in leadership positions and managing our farms. Adelé was the only female abalone production manager in the country when she started out.

### Save our coastline

Over excessive poaching is ruining nature and it seems that there is not sufficient progress in stop-

ping it. "Government is now considering the possibility of restocking the oceans with the help of abalone farming operations such as ours, but it is not yet viable as there are small genetic differences between our farmed abalone and the wild abalone. Abalone ranching projects on the West Coast are experimenting with relocating abalone to the ocean and harvesting them years later." Aqunion's contribution to being part of a remedy for the poaching problem is a programme whereby they bid on confiscated stock sold on auction, then process and sell the products and plough the profit back into the local community.



### FACTS & FIGURES

- The South African land based abalone farming industry is over 20 years old.
- Abalone stock are continuously selected for their fast growing aspects.
- Farmed abalone are ready for harvesting after 3-6 years.
- In the wild it takes an abalone 12 years to reach the current legal harvesting size.
- The largest South African abalone ever caught weighed 2.6kg and was estimated to be 30 years old.
- Water and air supply forms the lifeblood of the farm -
  - Abalone starts showing signs of stress (halted growth) a mere 1-2 hours after the air supply has been cut, and
  - as little as 8 hours without freshly pumped water will cause the abalone to stress which affects their immune systems making them susceptible to disease.





### It's not the ceiling yet

The abalone farming industry is still relatively young when compared to, for example, the poultry industry of South Africa. It is also a high-risk business needing large investments. "There is so much more to learn about the industry and the scientist in me loves that challenge. Furthermore, I have to personally grow with the industry," she admits. "I've changed course a bit from being a scientist and a farmer to managing the business and people and I could do with further honing my business and leadership skills.

An MBA might be on the cards. Fortunately I'm still being challenged career-wise as the company has grown from employing 40 people to the current staff complement of 400."

One of Adélé's favourite quotes is from Maya Angelou: "We may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated." ●



**Alison**  
Notley





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## FIBRE OF THE INCA GODS

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One is not at all surprised to hear that the young Prince George wore booties handmade by Alison Notley, one of SA's very first alpaca farmers.

Alison and husband Christopher are born Brits who spent three decades in Zimbabwe before moving to South Africa. Not being city people and due to Alison's affinity for the sport of dressage, they were looking for a piece of land big enough for themselves

and their two horses. "On an exploratory road trip to McGregor, I pushed a note under an estate agent's door in Villiersdorp with our wish list - nothing ventured, nothing gained," Alison remembers. "First prize was to find a property with a house needing a bit of renovation. The agent came back to us with a proposal and although we weren't expecting to buy something quite as derelict, Helderstroom farm was perfect."





It has been such fun being part of a fledgling Industry from the word go, helping to lay the groundwork.

This 4.8ha property was twice the size of their previous property in Harare and they wondered what to do with the extra grazing that two horses wouldn't need. On her way to Botswana, Alison, a conference organiser who still travelled a lot for work, read an article about the first alpacas from Chile arriving in South Africa. "I tore out that article and the second shipment of alpacas to arrive from Chile included ours. In 2004 pregnant female alpacas were selling for around R35 000 each.

For the first two years she continued with her formal job while Christopher, a retired army officer, focused on the animals. Soon Alison was convinced that the alpacas were her passion also.

"In the beginning we sold all our fleece to Jan Jamieson (also a previous Female Entrepreneur competition winner) as she also had alpacas and knew about weaving," Alison says. "Following the completion of a conference in Maputo in 2008 by which time our five females had had their babies, instantly growing our herd significantly, I realised it was time I changed horses. I left the corporate world altogether, bought a spinning wheel and taught myself to spin." While Alison was learning to spin, they were sending all their fibre to a breeder in Mooirivier who had imported a mini mill from Canada and who was producing machine spun yarn. "But that was not the route I wanted to go, I much preferred to get ladies to knit with our own hand-spun yarn."

### Spinners and knitters needed

Word got out that Alison was looking for spinners and in 2009 first Brenda Willemse and then Theresa Jansen from the local community joined the Helder-

stroom team. They both soon got the knack of spinning. "To boost their morale I made them members of the Cape Guild of Spinners and Weavers and entered them for the next spinning competition. Brenda surprised us by winning first prize – a feat that she repeated. Theresa has won twice and a third lady we employed during 2014 won in that year, so for the past five consecutive years we have very proudly brought the trophy back to Helderstroom!"

According to Brenda she initially just thought to try something new when applying for the job. "I never knew I would like it so much," she shares. When asked what makes her so good at spinning, she humbly says that she must be doing something right – perhaps her rhythm. Brenda recently also made a presentation about yarn and spinning techniques at one of the Guild's monthly meetings. "Remember, English is not her first language, and yet, they have both become much more confident than they were – they really know what they are doing," says Alison. Brenda is coincidentally also the farm's shearer. Both Brenda and Theresa's daughters modelled at the Guild's recent fashion show.

"I placed a small ad in one of the community newspapers to invite knitters and received a flurry of replies from avid knitters in Villiersdorp, Hermanus, Franschhoek, Napier and Cape Town and today we have some twenty ladies creating the most beautiful baby and toddler wear, as well as jackets, cardigans and jumpers for ladies." One of Alison's star knitters, 70-year old Molly Goddard lives in Hermanus in a retirement home. "I believe being part of our business in this way gives her purpose."





### Uphill and downhill

The main challenge of their business is related to marketing the finished product. "Alpaca fibre is rare and very fine – rarer than cashmere – and processing it is a lengthy business. It goes to reason that it demands a high price, but I encourage my clients to think of it as 'exclusive', rather than merely 'expensive'." The Johannesburg market has proven to most appreciate her products. "One must remember it is a handmade item of high quality. We only ever make a single item of a certain pattern and colour, and due to the quality it will survive to become an heirloom and can be handed down and treasured for generations."

"Winning the Female Entrepreneur competition's category for smallholders in 2011 definitely held some welcome marketing value," she says. "For the industry it was good as it put alpacas on the map a bit and it was a great thing for our team's morale – Helderstroom is, after all, all about teamwork."

Alpacas are extremely friendly and lovable animals and one easily sees why Allison fondly talks about them as her girls and boys. Losing her most favourite of them all early in 2015 was one of the most difficult experiences for her. Pepper was born as a twin, weighing a mere 2.4kg. "It is extremely rare for alpacas to bear twins and Pepper's mother shunned her. So we hand-raised her from day one and she grew up in the house. Pepper was the most astonishing alpaca and exquisitely beautiful – surely the most photographed alpaca in South Africa. Fortunately she did learn how to be an alpaca and gave us a boy named Chilli."

One positive result from the very many visits to the Drakenstein Veterinary Clinic with a sick Pepper was a very successful conference on alpaca health that Alison arranged in June 2015. With her background in conference organising and her experience with the animals, she succeeded in arranging an alpaca-specific conference with an international speaker and 46 delegates in attendance. "With some 6,000 animals in the country it was time that we start building the knowledge base." Allison is also the president of the growing South African Alpaca Breeders' Society (it currently has 52 members).

### ALPACA FACTS:

- Alpaca fleece comes in 22 natural colours.
- Alpacas normally live between 16 – 23 years (similar to a horse).
- Alpaca fleece is four times stronger than sheep's wool.
- Animals are shorn once a year and yields 2-3 kg.
- They are the oldest semi-domesticated animals in the world.







Helderstroom currently has 43 animals with an additional 13 babies (or “crias”) due in March/April 2016. A small current expansion involves using some 45kg of Peruvian yarn and roving bought from the late Jan Jamieson (which is too fine for knitting) to create woven works of art. “Alpaca fibre creations really belong in galleries, not shops,” Alison muses. Yet, Alison is determined to keep her business relatively

small and her products exclusive. “We’ve seen that having two spinners and no more than 50 animals is ideal for us and the land.”

The softest creamy-coloured booties and a baby shawl were hand delivered to Kensington Palace to grace the royal feet of little George, compliments of Helderstroom farm – products indeed fit for a king. ●



**Carole**  
Kirkwood-Pretorius





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## I HAD A FARM IN AFRICA

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Farming in Africa can be every bit as harsh and as rewarding as the famous film about Karen Blixen suggested. For Carole Kirkwood-Pretorius Capre-Avontuur, a once derelict farm along a most treacherous road into the Ceres Karoo, brought healing and anew sense of purpose.

The farm's original name, Avontuur (adventure), seems to describe Carole's journey perfectly. Carole, a pharmacist by trade living in St. James on the way to Muizenberg, survived a brutal hijacking and in an

effort to find a positive outlet for her consequent depression, joined the SPCA as volunteer. "I was always rescuing animals, especially farm animals that were inappropriately kept as pets," she says.

"And then I met a blind kid (of the animal kind) named Stevie. I was asked to take him home to nurse for the night and ended up raising him. I loved him – he was my therapy along with all the other potbellies I saved."





One of my uttermost joys are hearing the bleat of a new-born kid, holding it in my arms and breathing in that little-goat smell.

A back yard bursting with animals encouraged Carole and her husband Anthony to buy a little farm in Aurora along the West Coast. (Anthony works in Cape Town during the week and joins her over the weekends.) “Getting away from the hustle and bustle of the city further helped me get my life back and I started farming with chickens, milk goats, pigs and sheep on a small scale. During the three years that we lived there, I wasn’t able to slaughter one single animal – we sold the farm with them all when we returned to the city.”

Carole soon realised that farm life had gotten under her skin and that city life was no longer for her. In 2007 she bought Avontuur, a 1,362 ha dilapidated farm. “The day that we came to view the farm it was 40° and a total of three cars passed by the whole day. I simply knew, this was it.”

Up until then Carole had operated as a weekend farmer, but towards the end of 2007 she turned full-time farmer and bought 20 Damara sheep (which almost vanished in the vast veld). The next year she augmented her stock with Saanen milk goats and 20 pigs. Carole had much to learn and did so with the help of the internet, books, courses and advice from fellow farmers. “I sure made many mistakes,” she remembers. “I’ve always liked the beautiful eyes of cows and decided to buy two Jersey bulls. Unfortunately one died from eating a toxic plant and the other fell into an aardvark burrow and died. This last one was like a large puppy who followed me around. I could even vaccinate it without putting it into a crush.”

Her Damara herd has grown to 147 (the mainstay of her business) and she is able to market 10 – 12 lambs per month, in addition to some 100kg of wors and mince. Damara produces very lean meat and there-

fore her health conscious clients much prefer this meat. Carole has regular clients all over Cape Town and close-by Ceres who regularly order directly from her. Her product has been certified as Karoo Lamb which earns her an additional marketing edge and premium price. During the winter months she also produce about 1,000 broiler chickens a month. (Apparently our feathered friends faints during the blazing summer months.) Carole chooses to process the meat on the farm as market prices when selling directly to the abattoirs are low and profit margins consequently limited.

Initially Carole milked her goats to make cheese, but after contracting carpal tunnel syndrome in both her wrists she had to revert to breeding with these animals. “I am now able to sell weaners twice a year and sell my rams as breeding stock. Because I choose to hand raise the kids, they are easier to handle once they’re adults.” Carole made sure to buy top quality breeding stock with much sought after genetics, including one of three top Bunte Deutsche Edelziege (BDE) goats in the country from the likes of Donald Mouton, herd master of Fairview. The offspring she advertises on the internet and by word of mouth breeders from all over have approached her. For this reason Carole do not feel threatened or undervalued by her male counterparts. “I know I have high quality stock to offer and at the agricultural meetings the men shake hands with me like they would with one of their peers.”

“Although I really love the Damara, my real passion lies with the goats. Yes, they are naughty and eat my newly planted fig trees and climb through any fence, but I can’t wait to milk them again. They have such personality.” Carol recently planted numerous fig trees as she plans to, again in future, produce goats’ milk cheese and package it with sugared green figs.

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In the daytime you felt that you had got high up; near to the sun, but the early mornings and evenings were limpid and restful, and the nights were cold.

- Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa* -





### No easy ride

This arid area annually receives an average of 104mm of rain (compared to Cape Town's average of 475mm). "The current drought has been going for a couple of years and for this year we've not even been able to measure 50mm," she says. "Fortunately the Damara sheep can convert any seemingly dry bush into nutrition." However, one of her biggest challenges and greatest expenses is buying fodder for her animals. "For the pigs I am able to buy wholesale directly from Epol and I augment this with free sub quality fruit from the nearby pack stores once a week.

Some clients have remarked that they enjoy the slightly sweet flavour of my pork – I wouldn't know as I don't eat my own animals," she smiles. Yes, she still finds it difficult to take her stock to the abattoir,

"but I know that I can make a living only by allowing others to enjoy the meat I produce."

### Sharing the silence

"The silence is therapeutic and I needed it after my ordeal," she shares. "Now I am able to share that with others." Carole receives people needing to find their feet, directed here from the Ceres hospital or court, and allow them to stay and work with the animals. "The touch and love of animals works wonders." Carole is not compensated for this service.

In another effort to reach out to others, Carole has given a former farm worker with a desire to farm, the use of 100ha of her land. Whereas he started off with 3 goats and 6 ewes, he now earns a living from his herd of 40 sheep.







### Looking to the horizon

"I've chosen this lifestyle, and sometimes when the silence becomes a bit much, I recharge my batteries in Cape Town. And yes, sometimes I think how wonderful it would be to buy a farm with electricity, or closer to civilisation, but then again I enjoy the beauty of this seemingly unforbidden landscape ..." Carole's vision is to expand her sheep herd to at least 500 and to start producing cheese again in the near future. She does not hesitate when asked whether she would encourage someone who is interested in agriculture.

"But you have to do your research, consider the pros and cons and talk to people already in the field of your interest. And you need sufficient financial backing to see you through the initial years when you learn things the hard (and expensive) way."

Carole seems comfortable in her skin. Evidently, being a farmer (despite the hardships) has become a vital part of her journey of healing and living life to the fullest. ●



**Doret  
Smit**

2004 National Winner: Young Aspirant Farmer





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## TEAMWORK DOES IT BEST

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Far from the madding crowd and the conveniences of city life, Doret Smit works the land side-by-side with husband André on their farm some distance from Laingsburg in the Karoo. "At the time that I won the Female Entrepreneur competition in 2004. I still felt I needed to fight for my position as a woman in agriculture," she remembers. "I desperately needed to prove myself and the competition gave me a much appreciated tap on the shoulder. But during the past eleven years I've come to realise that

it brings great satisfaction and great success if you work in partnership with someone who loves the farm as much as you do."

Doret knew she would be a farmer since she was five years old. While her classmates considered becoming fire fighters or teachers, she was determined to follow in the footsteps of her farmer parents. "The farm was my life even then and when my friends reported about their December holidays at the beach,



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I've found contentment in being a farmer.  
You develop a certain depth of soul through  
the highs and lows.

I would share how I threw in my weight during the apricot harvesting season.” Doret and husband André annually produces some 12 tons of dried apricots, 12 tons of dried peaches, onion seed and supplies the De Doorns wine cellar with 750 tons of grapes. Due to the vast distances to the markets, the lot fell on adding value by drying most of the products.

“In high school in Oudtshoorn I was the only girl to take Agricultural Science as subject and was determined to be the best performer – all in an effort to prove that I could do this. But on the farm I’ve never felt the pressure.”

“Today I do not need acknowledgement as I probably did before, but that period of establishing myself in the predominantly male world of farming was vital for my personal growth. Today I enjoy the fact that while the men fix the pumps, I strategize or handle the workers. I don’t need to be able to do it all.” In hindsight Doret feels it is a waste of energy to continue to focus on gender inequalities in agriculture: “Rather concentrate on working in harmony; your hard work and dedication will open doors and will earn you your rightful place.”

Doret is the only female board member of the local cooperative.





We are equal partners and focus on what we do best for the success of the business.





### In the face of hardship

Doret does not hesitate to admit that farming is a harsh and challenging career and that you are at the mercy of a myriad of external influences like the weather, markets and currency rates. Irrigation farming in the water scarce Karoo presents its own special challenges with the vast distances and absence of agricultural experts impacting on one's success. "In addition we have to trump the cost pinch of increasing electricity, labour and input costs." One of their future endeavours will be to increasingly harness the power of the sun in an effort to become self-sufficient with regards to their dependency on electricity supplied by Eskom.

A debilitating flood in January 2014, reminiscent of the 1981 flood that traumatised the town of Laingsburg, brought them to their knees with extreme damage to vineyards, orchards, pipelines and their

access through Boesmanspoort. Before that, a severe hailstorm in May 2005 caused great devastation. "Fortunately it came after the grape and apricot harvest. You simply choose to count your blessings when you're a farmer and your passion for the land will help you to persevere and face all the challenges with a long-term vision," she says.

Doret bestows high praise on her worker team – some of whom has been with the Smits for many decades. "I'm seeing a trend that young people from the towns are not inclined to live on the farms on a permanent basis like their parents did – and understandably so. The young generation will still work here during the week, but wants to be in town over the weekend. Unfortunately this tendency often negatively impacts on the long-term commitment of workers. It is vital that we operate as a team on the farm – especially since we are so remote."





According to Doret they are also a little concerned about the decreased accessibility to research results regarding such issues as animal vaccines and new fruit cultivars. "Private companies are seemingly conducting the bulk of research and consequently the expense for farmers is dramatically on the rise."

"One of my absolute career highlights thus far has been the recent acquisition of the neighbouring farm, which enabled us to expand our farming operation. We are leaving a legacy for our children and for this reason we are committed to continue with what we know best, all the while conserving the land and its resources for generations to come." ●





**Gesie**  
van Deventer



## FARMER WITH A HEART FOR HER COMMUNITY

During a conversation with Gesie van Deventer, wine producer and current Executive Mayor of the Drakenstein Municipality, one inevitable wonders when she sleeps. Gesie is noticeably first and foremost passionate about agriculture and not even her political activities could dampen that. "I became a mayor and decided to borrow time from my career to give back to the community. I believe all South Africans owe it to our country to give of their time and energy to make a difference." And considering

the fact that this, the second largest municipality in the Western Cape, is now listed among the Top 10 in the country and has to date received more than a hundred national and provincial awards, she has done just that.

Gesie's career path suggests that about-turns do not phase her, but rather energise her to do more with the limited time available. Following a childhood spent in a financially strained environment in Van



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At that stage I exchanged my barrister's robe, designer clothes and high-heeled designer shoes for gumboots and overalls.

Rhynsdorp, she believed the only way out would be to become an advocate. This she achieved at a very young age in a then male dominated environment. “Then, when I was 36 I felt the tug of agriculture; a call back to nature and land, the healing power of the sun, the wind and the rain. I then enrolled at the Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute (because they really have a good name in the sector).” And why wine? “When I first entered the lush winelands from the arid platteland, I fell in love with the wine culture – there never was any other option! And in any case, I would make a lousy livestock farmer – I’d never be able to slaughter my animals.”

### No half measures

In farming, as in all other areas of her life and career, there exist no half measures. In 1999 a cellar was built on the farm Domaine Brahms, and soon thereafter their maiden vintage won the Paarl Shiraz Challenge. Since then Gesie has won (amongst many wine and other accolades) the 2002 Female Entrepreneur competition (national markets), in the 2003 the overall Female Entrepreneur award in the Western Cape and in 2010 the exporter of the year award. In 2003 she also became the first female Chairperson of Paarl Vintners’ Board of Directors and of the Board of Directors of Casidra.







Her vision concerning her wine is to continue to produce small quantities of exceptional quality from the 20 hectares of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinotage, Shiraz and Chenin Blanc. “Well managed, every setback can be a great opportunity: when the American economy experienced a slump, it was a natural choice to turn my attention to growing my market in Japan and today I export 98% of the wine to Japan!”

Being mayor of such a large constituency demands long hours. “My heart, however, remains with agriculture and one day, when I have fulfilled my mandate from my residents, I shall once again turn my full attention to agriculture. In the meantime my husband, Johan, and I, have appointed a small core of skilled people to whom I can delegate all the work, and on weekends I monitor the progress.”

The farming operation has been diversified effectively. In addition to being a wine producer and wine outlet, a wedding function venue, museum for antique tractors and equipment, and a soon-to-open antique tearoom and gift shop complete the picture.

### **Mayoral benefits**

The mayor's chain around Gesie's neck has definite benefits for the farmers in the Paarl and Wellington region. Early on during her term she instituted an agricultural portfolio and hers has become the only municipality with a special waiting list for housing for agricultural workers. “Some 80% of our area comprises a rural, agricultural segment and formerly the agricultural workers were excluded from

the housing beneficiary list,” she says passionately. “Today 20% of every housing development has to be allocated to agricultural workers. It is vital that they are in this way economically empowered.” As mayor, Gesie also pays specific attention to the infrastructure which impact on the productivity of the area's farmers. “To date we've fixed more than 14 000 potholes and resurfaced many roads, as sound roads encourage agri-tourism and smooth the way for producers delivering their produce during harvest time.” In partnership with Kaap Agri and a large financial institution, several structures have been built at bus stops to create safe waiting areas for school kids traveling from the rural areas.

### **Challenges or opportunities?**

Gesie feels that gender transformation should be moving along a bit faster. There are definitely more women qualifying at agricultural training institutions, but the question that begs answering is how many female farm managers or directors of large agricultural businesses are there? Women should identify and capitalise on the existing opportunities. According to Gesie the successful management of the labour issues within the South African context should be priority. “Accept the challenges and make peace with the realities, then work to create an environment conducive to economic growth and empowerment. The saying goes: ‘n Boer maak 'n plan (a farmer will make a plan) – and not without reason! South African farmers are amazingly resourceful and optimistic.”

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Never accept a career ceiling simply because you are a woman. Women should walk forward boldly with the talents they possess. We have to refuse to be victims of any system or traditional roles or perception.



Gesie's life philosophy actually wraps it all up: Theobald Ziegler said: "Success is like a ladder, and no one has ever climbed a ladder with his hands in his pockets."

"When things get tough, you simply work a bit harder. Agriculture remains a passion for me and South Africa remains the best place in the world! I am here to stay and help build this beautiful country of ours." ●





**Ilse  
Ruthford**

2014 National Winner: Top Entrepreneur Processing



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## A COMPANY WITH HEART

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Upon meeting Ilse Ruthford for the first time, no one would blame you if you mistook this casually dressed, unassuming young woman for just another staff member of Compagniesdrift. Ten minutes into the interview her passion for the people of this mega bottling and wine storage facility on the outskirts of Stellenbosch, and the quiet authority with which she talks about their business have you convinced that she indeed deserves her position as managing director.

Everything the 40-year old Ilse did after completing matric in 1994 seemed to have prepared her for this position: a 2-year marketing course at Boland College, courses at the Cape Wine Academy and then various jobs on wine farms where she gained valuable industry exposure by manning tasting rooms, handling the admin and washing glasses. "I love that this industry offers so many different opportunities," Ilse says.





I always knew I was created for more and when I joined Meerlust I felt like coming home. My background and education differs from the majority of workers on the farm, but I learn so much from them. They keep me grounded. I want to be here every day!

"Initially I moved around a lot, not because I was unhappy anywhere, but because there was simply so much to learn. At Kleine Zalze I realised that my structured, organised personality suited the field of exports administration to a tee." For four years she exchanged the wine farms for the corporate world of wine and joined JF Hillebrand, a freight forwarding company.

"When I joined Meerlust Wine Estate in November 2006 as export officer, everything simply fell into place," she remembers. "I belong here." The owners of Meerlust quickly recognised her potential as a dedicated hardworking and much-loved employee and when initiating their land reform project, Ilse was the obvious choice as the representative of the workers.

In 2009 the Myburgh family of Meerlust expressed the wish to make a long-term investment to the benefit of their workers. With assistance from the then Department of Land Affairs, Meerlust Workers Trust Investments (trading as Compagniesdrift) was formed and enabled to buy land with vineyards and farm worker housing from the family trust. The company enjoys a 50-50 partnership with the Meerlust Family Trust and Ilse was elected as a director together with Florina Jordaan, a vineyard supervisor on the side of the workers and Albie de Waal (Ilse's mentor and MD of Meerlust) and Hannes Myburgh (owner) for Meerlust.

Today, the company celebrates five years of empowerment for its 72 beneficiaries, including workers from Meerlust, Ken Forrester and Vriesenhof wine farms.

Compagniesdrift offers a storage, bottling and labelling service to the wine industry. "Initially we considered simply making wine, but realised that our position close to the N2 near Cape Town and the harbour, was our biggest asset. Also, Meerlust did not have its own storage facility so we were immediately sure of at least one client." Their business is indeed flourishing with no less than 55 clients depending on them for the storage of some 2,3million bottles of wine.

"The need for storage space is huge," she says. "And we make it really easy for clients to use us: we even process and distribute orders on their behalf. We are inundated with enquiries and will soon have to expand by using our available space more effectively and eventually expanding."

### **Not without its challenges**

Five years down the line the company is doing well, but are as yet unable to pay dividends to the beneficiaries. "My biggest desire is that our workers will really understand the depth of the long-term benefits of this project. Some have little or no literacy and the concept of such a large business is hard to fathom – it is difficult to be thankful when you don't experience the benefits on a daily basis. I share my excitement with them every chance I get. Just think: we co-own a profitable company with a secure standing and reputation in the country's wine industry, and in future we can be the sole owners thereof!"

"But we need to focus on the development of life skills such as decision-making and working independently," she says. "The company will not be able to grow without the growth of its people."



I have just three obsessions: agriculture,  
Compagniesdrift and my family!





### **Wearing the female entrepreneur crown: 2014**

"I've always felt that if I could win such a competition as the Department of Agriculture's Female Entrepreneur award, it would be the ideal way of showing my gratitude towards the Meerlust team. I knew it would also give Compagniesdrift a chance to shine." In 2014 this dream came true as Ilse held high the trophy for the Western Cape Female Entrepreneur in the category for processors (bottling of wine). She also went on to pocket the national award in this category.

With part of Ilse's prize money she helped the workers to start a vegetable garden. "We need to give attention to food security and healthy eating. Often vegetables do not make it onto the shopping list and I'd like to help change that."

### **Sharing her experience**

Ilse has learnt several vital lessons – of business and of land reform. "No land reform scheme will ever work without mutual trust and respect. I trust our partners 100%."

She also knows that a business as theirs should not depend on immediate profits, but should have a long-term vision. "Profit is not the main goal of a land reform project, but rather the true empowerment of the beneficiaries; being part of a real company, having opportunities to grow and to be involved with something really big." For Ilse personal growth is much more important than money. "This is for our children's children!"





"Wouldn't it be wonderful if our workers and children realise that they are no longer bound to one farm, but that they could apply for work elsewhere with their newly gained skills."

Our aim with every work function or excursion or training opportunity is to broaden their horizons."

One of the immediate benefits of being part of this project is that young people who finish matric now have the opportunity to study and to spread their wings."

"The future...well, I don't see myself anywhere else. This is my life. It is after all, so much more than just a job." ●





Ingrid  
de Waal



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## PURPLE HUES OF SUCCESS

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Ingrid de Waal's enthusiasm for her business is quite infectious. It is abundantly clear that the development of new product lines brings deep satisfaction – even when the markets are sometimes not yet ready for her innovative ideas. “Giving up is simply not part of who I am,” she says. “When my heart is in a product, I will tweak the product and its packaging until it works.”

Ten years ago Ingrid, then a French lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch, felt the need to create

her own business on their wine farm, Canettevallei, in Stellenboschkloof.

“We knew we would one day open a wine tasting venue and I thought it would be ideal to offer visitors something else as well.” The available resources included land, grapes and labour. An antique flask adorned with the Dutch words Kaapsche Mostkonfijt given to her by her mother-in-law triggered the idea to produce this delicacy.



Moskonfyt or grape must jam is a traditional South African product which dates back to the early days of the old Cape when they first started producing grapes.

"We are one of the only producers in the country who still make moskonfyt according to the age-old method," she shares. "I use grape juice straight from the cellar, stoke the fires at 06:00 in the morning with blue gum wood from the farm and then simmer the juice in 150 litre pots for the entire day. At the end of the day, some 80% of the liquid has reduced to a light typically sweet-sour syrup – without adding any sugar."

During the six weeks of the grape harvest Ingrid is able to produce 5,000 flasks (distinctly similar to the antique gift) which she has elected to supply only to farm stalls. "In this way the product keeps its unique character as something representing the Western Cape history and food culture."

#### Next challenge, please

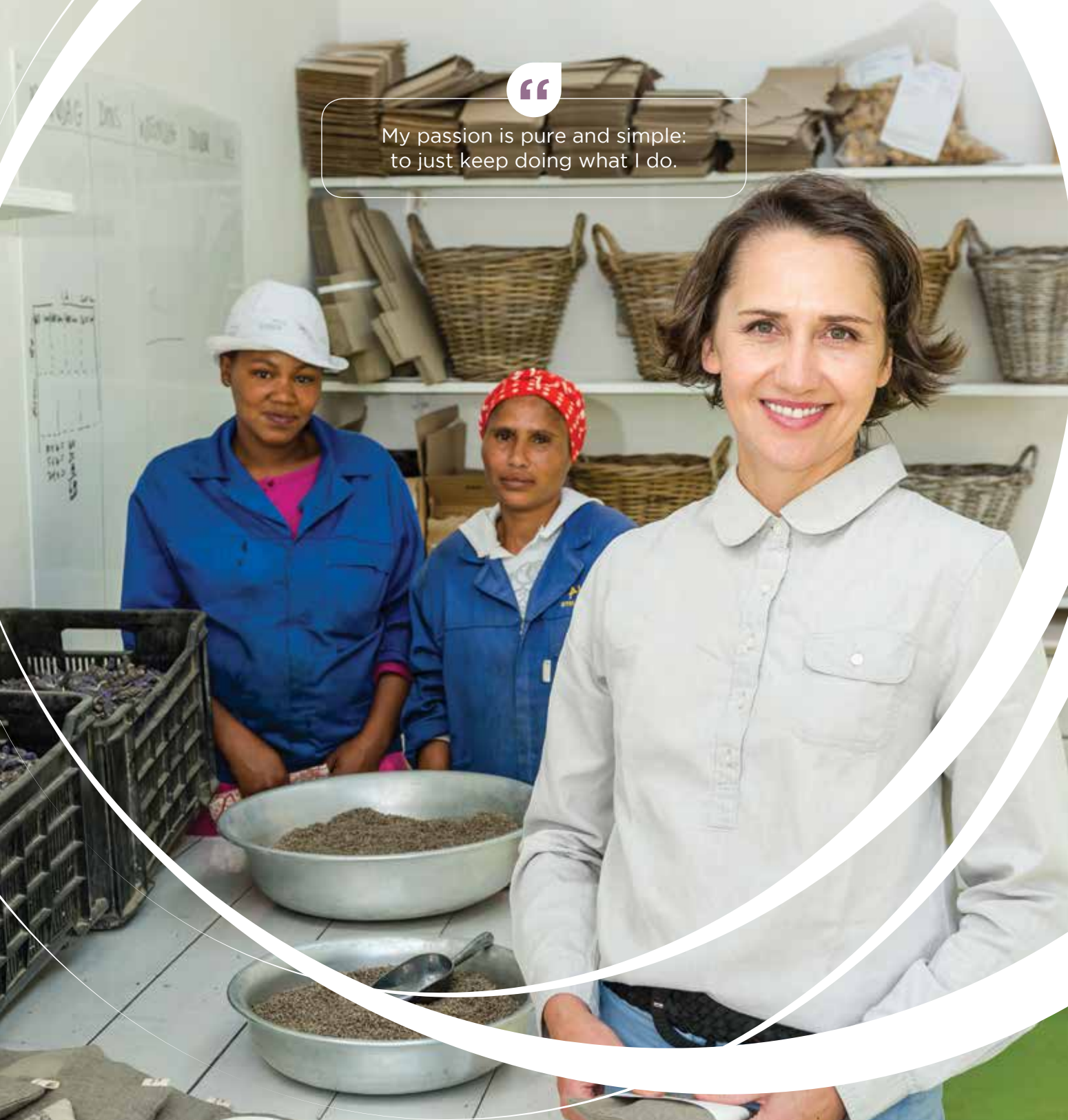
True to her inclination of moving on to new ideas when one project becomes sufficiently successful, Ingrid noticed that the essential oil industry was picking up. "Everyone was suddenly planting rose geranium and buchu, but following my time spent in Provence I thought lavender would ideally complement our winemaking operation."

Her first harvest brought in 15 tons of these oil-bearing purple flowers, leaving her with 150 kg of oil (essential oil is measured in kg and not litres). "Initially I literally drove from health shop to health shop to pawn my little bottles of pure lavender oil. Fortunately my timing was spot-on and the direct marketing approach paid off. Also, people who used essential oils were already familiar with the health properties of this oil."



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My passion is pure and simple:  
to just keep doing what I do.





Lavender is famous for its anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory, muscle relaxing and anti-depressant properties, as well as its soothing treatment of minor burns and insect bites.

As Ingrid had enough oil left for the second year, she decided to dry the next harvest. "This left me with mountains of flowers and I really struggled with different applications," she says. "I suggested that hotels put sachets on their guests' pillows instead of chocolate, and marketed the dried flowers as con-

fetti, but no one seemed ready for my ideas." And then her tenacity paid off and suddenly everyone wanted her products. "One of my greatest joys is when a product sells; when people like it enough to want to have it. On the other hand one of the greatest challenges is keeping your product lines unique."





Ingrid knows from experience that perseverance is key. "Initially there was no information on lavender farming available, no one to give you advice and the industry was very secretive – in fact, it was quite lone-some." After recently having won the Commercial category of the Female Entrepreneur competition, she was inundated with women enquiring about starting a similar business. Competition poses no threat to her: "it will only strengthen the industry."

Three years ago Ingrid opened a little gift shop, Laventelhaan, on the farm to invite people to enjoy the beautiful environment and to offer a window on her business. "I've since realised that it is vital not to make all my product lines available in the retail environment. People expect to see something special when they visit the shop." The three products aimed for the larger retail environment is the essential oil, the dream pillows and the soap range she is busy developing.

"I've always been fascinated by natural handmade soap so at the start of 2015 my five employees and I attended a soap making course. It had to be the

traditional method of using caustic soda – the slow process with no artificial additives." The many flops and extended and exacting testing and development process don't deter her at all. Ingrid dreams of establishing the soap line as a separate business through which her employees can somehow benefit.

### Something for the eye

The oil-giving lavender cultivar flowers for only six weeks a year and people visiting Canettevallei quite rightly expect to see oceans of purple. For this reason Ingrid planted cut flower species that flower for approximately six months of the year and a welcome cash flow opportunity arose when Ingrid was able to sell bunches of the flowers to a local retailer. "These little bunches absolutely flew from the shelves around Mother's Day and in 2016 this will again be one of our main marketing drives."

The fact that Ingrid has just recently established some 20 000 cuttings after the old bushes have reached the end of their productive lives, bears testimony of the continued success of Canettevallei Lavender. ●





# Jacky Goliath

2011 National Winner: Top Commercial Producer





## A FINE EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS: DE FYNNE

Her background as a horticulturist and time spent working in the Agricultural Research Council's fynbos section and ASNAPP (Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products), created the perfect foundation for Jacky Goliath's future endeavours. In their free time she and business partner, Elton Jefthas, started their own nursery in Kylesmore with 1,000 fynbos plants and dubbed it De Fynne.

Due to the ever-increasing demand for water wise plants they soon extended their operation to include

20,000 plants on half a hectare. The drawback with fynbos is that you need approximately 12 months to have market ready fynbos plants. A five-year contract to annually produce 500 000 blue berry plants sufficiently complemented their cash flow.

Next they moved to 1.5 ha in Simondium and in 2008 Jacky took the bold step of exchanging the security of a monthly salary to become full-time manager of the nursery. Again they needed to expand and in March 2013 De Fynne moved to a 22ha prune farm obtained through government assistance.



#### RECENT AWARDS:

- 2011 DAFF Female Entrepreneur of the Year – Western Cape Department of Agriculture and nationally
- Africa's Fastest Growing SMME – commercial level
- 2012 Best New Entrant to Agriculture
- 2015 Toyota New Harvest of the Year award

De Fynne is now in their second year of full production on their Wellington Farm and in addition to other clients, they supply Woolworths with some 3,000 plants per week (up from the initial 500 buchu plants a year).

"It is definitely not easy sailing when one supplies to large retailers and the pressure for continuous quality is high," she admits. "But my relationship with them has helped me to put the right systems in place to ensure products of exceptional quality.

One cannot afford to have certain products aimed for the large retailer and plants of a lesser quality for smaller clients." During the six years that Jacky has constantly supplied Woolworths with such products, including fynbos plants and a variety of fruit-bearing plants (strawberries, blue berries, granadillas and tomatoes) she has gained first-hand insight into the fact that respectable companies like Woolworths do not support black farmers simply for the sake of improving their BEE scorecard – "high quality levels and a professional approach are non-negotiable".





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Women do not have to fight so hard to secure the respect from the sector. They are increasingly visible. I have a voice.





Today De Fynne supplies more than 15 different products, which means careful planning for every next season. “You have to know exactly when to plant the cuttings and how to nurture the plants so that when the consumer picks up the plant in the shop, it boasts both attractive ripe and green fruit.” Jacky’s previous experience has prepared her for this challenging business of readying every type of plant to the exact specifications set by the client and she has been able to transfer this knowledge to her 30 employees.

### One step ahead

New product development is crucial for the growth of any business and Jacky and Elton’s innovative approach and keen eye for new ideas are keeping them in demand. The feedback from existing clients, trends concerning food, flowers and events, and ide-

as noticed when travelling, help keep them ahead of the pack. Currently they are working on a mobile garden which takes the concept of a vertical garden one step further. “We are creating sleeves with herbs, salads and edible flowers, as well as flower gardens with different colour groupings. The idea is that this garden do not have to be specially installed, but could hang anywhere convenient and the herb sleeve could even serve as a centre piece from which guests can harvest their own fresh herbs or salad leaves while sitting around the dinner table.”

“The trend is very much for people to grow their own fruit and vegetables – a return to the basics,” she says. “But people need to be able to do it in small spaces, in pots and with the least hassles. Our products are ideal for those who long to harvest their own blue berries or tomatoes.”





### Plums – a welcome surprise

Some 10 ha of the farm is planted with plum trees previously exported by the former owner. “We are nursery people and thought we’d remove the trees,” Jacky says. “But considering what it takes to establish one hectare of orchards, we decided why not take on this new challenge! We asked assistance from consultants, attained our GLOBAL G.A.P. certification and were approved for export. Although the farm has its own packing line, we are not ready to handle this side of things.” Their harvest currently goes to a packing shed in Simondium, which also handle the marketing of the product. “But next year we aim to handle the whole process and are putting up a new potting shed so that the pack shed can be returned to its original purpose.” Jacky plans to replace some of the oldest plum trees (some of them is as old as 20 years) with newer varieties.

Jacky’s passion certainly has to do with there never being a dull moment on the farm. That and the joy of having a positive impact on the lives of her people. “If your employees are not happy, they will not be productive,” she says. “But it is about more than giving them the security of a monthly income: I want them to feel good about themselves as this will have a chain reaction in their communities.

I’ve heard from some of my people that it is better for them to be at work than at home and although this might seem sad, it proves that their jobs give them a reason to get up in the morning.”

The challenges of the farming environment are as real for her as any other commercial farmer. “The increasing scarcity of water worries us as this results in gardening becoming more of a luxury activity. People first have to put food on the table before beautifying their surroundings. Naturally we try to view this as an opportunity to supply water wise products. And then from an agricultural point of view, the labour issues and continuous threats of strikes proffer a large problem – fortunately not on our farm – but the emotions and destructive actions create an unhealthy environment for all.”

De Fynne is by no means settling into a quiet routine. Progress and growth is inevitable with Jacky driving things forward. In addition to the nursery, they also prepare varietal research material for a university, create rootstock and germinate seeds for various clients. As they say, watch this space. ●





**Jeanne  
Groenewald**

2006 National Winner: Top Producer for National Markets



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## NO SPRING CHICKEN TO BUSINESS

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Jeanne Groenewald is a formidable businesswoman playing in the big league. During the past 19 years, her production of free range chickens has exploded from 100 every eight weeks to 96 000 a week supplied to most of the large retailers. Elgin Free Range Chicken has since become a household name in the Western Cape amongst health and environmentally conscious shoppers.

The reason: in addition to ensuring that the chicks enjoy the freedom of roaming in natural pastures for part of the day, consumers are promised that no

growth promoters, animal by-products or anti-biotics are administered.

### **An unexpected rollercoaster ride**

No business plan preceded Jeanne's booming trade, but being 'burdened with being an entrepreneur' as she puts it, she constantly sees opportunities. "I initially imagined myself as the typical farmer's wife, raising chickens for own consumption. I bought 100 day-old chicks and from experience with farming with ducks, knew that it was possible to grow them naturally," she says.



Jeanne's entrepreneurial success has earned her the title of provincial and national Female Entrepreneur for National Markets in 2006, as well as the provincial winner in the commercial category in 2014. She also won the coveted Premier's Entrepreneurship Recognition Award in 2014, crowning her as Entrepreneur of the Year.

"Whenever I invited friends and family for a chicken roast, they would remark on the taste and just took what I had off my hands. At that time the concept of free range wasn't even on the radar." According to Jeanne word of mouth drove sales and although she never initially promoted the elements differentiating her product, the exceptional flavour convinced customers of its worth.

For the first year the entire operation took place on

their own farm, but when retailers started showing interest, expansion (contracting growers and building an own abattoir) became imperative. "In order to increase production we had to consider the issue of bio-security and spread the risk to other farms." Based on a contract with a large retailer in 2001 they built their current factory in Grabouw.

Another significant contract from a competing retailer soon followed.





Today there's really no need to keep harping on it being difficult for women in agriculture.





### Being a woman in the world of business

"For the first ten years I experienced a lot of resistance in this male dominated industry," she shares. "But not only about me being a woman. The general opinion was that it was impossible to farm in this way and that it would pose a threat to the industry. I really felt that I was not given respect and not listened to. During the next ten years everything has changed. I've proven myself and now men are asking me for advice."

### Facing her giants

"Capital is always a prickly pear for any new business. When you're starting out no one wants to give you any money, and once you're successful everybody is throwing money at you." Based on personal experience delegating responsibilities is one of the most difficult challenges for an entrepreneur. "Initially you believe that there is no one who can do what you do quite as good, but then when your business is growing you simply have to let go. And remember to delegate and give over full control of the specific responsibility. Let them burn their fingers."

My motto is that if there's a problem come to me with your own solution and we will find the best possible way forward. And the really amazing thing is that when you do allow people the freedom to use their own special skills, you realise that they are in fact contributing to new growth."

### People: our biggest challenge turned into our biggest achievement

Jeanne shares that one of the biggest challenges that she really only recently mastered is dealing with staff members and the surrounding community. With 370 people permanently employed and a very politically active community inclined to public unrest, Jeanne had her work cut out for her. "For a long time the community targeted us and wanted to close us down," she explains. "I couldn't understand how people who actually wanted schools, was trying to stop my people from coming to work so I took the hard approach. Actually I was only antagonising them further and my headstrong approach simply riled them still more."





Recently Jeanne began looking at the situation differently. “I initiated Tuesdays Cake with the MD whereby ten people from the factory, all from the same level of employment, would join me for coffee. We are not allowed to discuss work, but everyone has to share something about themselves and put their life dream on the table, so to speak.” The result is that Jeanne is getting to really know her staff, and vice versa. One of the most-shared dreams is that of attaining matric. “In reaction, we started a school on the premises (registered with the Department of Education) with one full-time teacher paid by us and one by the Department to assist workers during night school.” Jeanne also employed a gentleman with proficiency in eight of the official black languages to help the company to understand the different cultures and traditions, “simple things that improve our interaction tremendously”.

The issue with the irate community was also creatively addressed. “My staff members are loyal to the company, but they do get influenced by opinions of community leaders,” she says. “Consequently I identified the leaders of the four local wards and instituted a monthly meeting with them. During these sessions

I have learnt to be humble and not react with vengeance towards their hot emotions. Gently, but firmly, I’ve set the ground rules of our conversations: no talk about politics, no asking for money and be on time.” Following the first explorative conversations, Jeanne explained that she intended to make her corporate social investment funding available to making a difference in the wards. “Each ward have to put forward three proposals for the upliftment of the community and I will fund the best plans.” One of the recent requests was for a children’s play park. “In this way Elgin Free Range Chickens are fulfilling their responsibility to the surrounding community as we rely on them for labour,” she says. “The positive energy we’re spending on our people is reaping great rewards.”

Until now Jeanne has made the call to keep her business local – supplying only to Western Cape retailers – in order to enable her to also focus on her most important aim of being a good mother. However, people are showing interest in joining this extremely successful business to expand nationally. Who knows, soon city slickers in the north of the country might also be able to enjoy Elgin Free Range Chicken... ●





**Leslie**  
McGregor



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## HERBS GALORE

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At the tender age of 25 Leslie McGregor exchanged the familiarity of her family's sheep farm in Australia for the green vineyards of Paarl upon marrying her South African husband, Robert. In a community mostly populated by Afrikaans speakers, Leslie, a former secretary, was limited in what employment she could apply for in the area. One could say that her green fingers were her saving grace.

Leslie started to supply the farm that her husband was working for with potted flowering plants. When he bought Adelaarsvlugt, Leslie took the gap in the market for cut herbs and laid claim to the sides of the cucumber tunnels, populating them with all kinds of culinary herbs.



Leslie McGregor's once small-scale herb operation has grown so that she today employs no less than 85 people.

Leslie still seems surprised at her consequent success. "I canvassed restaurants in Stellenbosch and delivered the herbs in my car and then it became fashionable to use fresh herbs," she says. "The owner of the famous restaurant Ralph's in Stellenbosch was the first one to really give me a break. He said to me, 'Leslie, you can't sell at that price, you'll go broke!' He gave me invaluable advice on what to grow and what to charge."

The increase in demand enabled her to build a small tunnel for her herbs and then they started replacing first the cucumbers, and then the vineyards with herbs, until they needed still more space and bought

the neighbouring farm. Today you'll find Leslie in charge of 85 employees (mostly women) working on 22 hectares and producing half a ton of herbs per day. Initially the biggest sellers were rocket and basil. "The herb industry has become very trendy," Leslie says. "The Cape flats traditionally produced coriander and parsley, but with the advent of more and more televised cooking programmes the herb industry has received a very welcome boost. Now it is really competitive and one has to stay abreast of the latest trends." Leslie has expanded her offering to include baby salad mixes and micro greens. "Foodies seem to want everything smaller and smaller."



“

Farming is hard work, but to be able to get up in the morning with a farm stretched out around you and to see the growth, is really worth the effort. It's a lifestyle I wouldn't have traded for the world.





Throughout the years Leslie has gained in-depth experience of the changes in the herb market. “There’s always movement and one cannot afford to become stagnant in this industry. The biggest challenge is that chefs want herbs all year round, but this actually goes against the trend of seasonality and paying attention to one’s carbon footprint. To meet the demand during the winter time, I now have to import some products, even if only from the warmer areas of the Orange River or Johannesburg.” This negatively impacts her profit margins, but is imperative for survival.

Another important lesson Leslie has learnt the hard way, is never to rely on any one client for more than 20% of her income. “Rather have many clients and so minimise the chance of losing a large amount of money when a big client is suddenly unable to pay. We’ve been able to avoid big losses this way.”

### **People – pleasure and pain**

One clearly hears the respect and empathy Leslie has towards her staff, but admits that managing a large number of people and maintaining reasonable levels of discipline and good working relationships throughout all levels of the workforce can be quite stressful. “The labour laws have changed so much over the years and, although necessary, the consequential amount of paper work takes up much of my time. We spend a lot of energy when a disciplinary hearing is necessary. They are often emotional with difficult issues to deal with.” But Leslie says it’s very gratifying when some of the hearings become a counselling session where personal problems and issues with a staff member are amicably solved.

Her purest joys are similarly related to her staff. “It has been such a learning curve for me to get to know them; to understand the circumstances they live in.





We've shared so much about our health, our relationships and our children and often speak about issues such as the awful violence in their communities. Our staff turnover is minimal so my workforce is getting older.

I initially found it extremely difficult to delegate, but I've learnt to let go a bit and let my people take more of the responsibility."

Winning the Female Entrepreneur competition in 2003 took this humble lady completely by surprise.

"A salesman submitted my name and I was really flabbergasted when I won. I was also so happy, because it gave recognition and encouragement to everyone working here."

#### **As the future unfolds**

"I'm getting older and hope that when I'm ready to stop, someone will want to buy the business," Leslie says. "It would suit a young and enthusiastic person who could take a more scientific and mechanised approach to herb farming to realise higher profits." ●





**Liz**  
Eglington





## NATURE'S HEALING POWER

Liz Eglington's captivating journey into agriculture, and more specifically organic farming, unfortunately came via a long struggle with illness. Liz, owner of a financial consultancy specialising in asset financing for medical specialists and hospitals, was also a SA long-distance athlete when she contracted typhoid and bilharzia in the Okavango delta.

"Some twenty years ago I had just completed a murdering athletics season including the SA marathon

championships and the Two Oceans (she won this race in 1987) and decided to visit the Okavango to restore my depleted energy levels.

I admit, I was overdoing it a bit at that stage, competing for records, medals and for the attractive prize money. Instead of resting, I came back sick with permanent headaches and severe immune system problems – all undiagnosed for more than two years," she tells.



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We are what we eat and food should be our medicine; and the soil from which the food must come, becomes what we feed it.

Eventually specialists tagged it as yuppie flu. “I realise now that I was taking my health for granted, that I was on a tread mill of performance, acknowledgement, ego and money – I wasn’t going to get off by myself. Something would have to stop me ... and illness did it.” Liz was finally diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (also known as Myalgic Encephalopathy, ME); wrecking both her running career and interfering with work.

Liz turned to the natural healing world and found a community who were conscious of their impact on the earth. “I soon realised that healthy living meant healthy food, air and water and felt that I did not have that while living in the city. I started looking for a place within a 2-hour radius around Cape Town where I could establish a long-stay healing centre and upon visiting friends in Vanwyksdorp (Klein Karoo) bought the next-door farm.





The land was just as wounded as I was with no real life on it, but I saw the potential with its pure air and water.





Initially she thought as far as a vegetable garden, but realised that she'd have to heal the land first, so to speak. "I decided to start farming and let the health centre follow later and I knew organic would be the only way for me," she remembers. After two years of owning the farm, Liz was still commuting backwards and forwards, but then officially left the corporate world in exchange for farming.

The lot fell on olives, because firstly no one could steal her produce while she was away, the river was called Olijvenrivier and there were wild olive trees growing in the valley. Liz established 1,000 trees – an operation which has grown to now include 3,000 trees.

"People in the valley was very sceptical of me: an English-speaking lass with weird ideas. I visited other olive farms and everywhere I went, I got the same message: organic olive farming is a no-go." Her pure

determination, augmented with information from books and the internet and various courses, just served to strengthen her fascination of how nature actually works. "It is in fact a magical, perfectly balanced system and our nutrition is closely connected to it." Unfortunately the very intricate, symbiotic relationship of all natural systems are destroyed by chemistry and it is Liz's main priority to restore this balance and show the world that organic can work.

Liz worked through the six years it took for her newly established trees to show significant production, bought an olive press and built a small factory – all the while experiencing healing herself. Today people from all over the country come to her for teaching on growing real food. "Why? Because my farm is an oasis. Here they can see first-hand how nature works and how it is indeed possible to grow food on a commercial scale in complete balance with the earth."





### Marketing decisions

"Initially I was fully intentional to go the corporate route with my products," Liz says. "I paid a professional designer, appointed an agent and contacted all the large retailers – who were as excited as I was about my organic olives. But the consumer wasn't ready for my products. They continued to buy imported olive oil. For the first six years I was the only organic olive farmer in South Africa." This meant that while the supermarkets were eager to carry her products, large first orders would be slow to be replaced. From this situation Liz deduced that the consumer had to be educated.

"For this reason food festivals and markets have become my bread-and-butter – here I can talk to people and share my convictions." And the exquisite flavour of Liz's olive pâtés, bottled olives and extra virgin olive oil simply sell themselves. Here she also does her product development, listening to her clients. "I innovate on my feet at these markets. At the moment olive leaf tea is my passion."

Liz is no longer chasing results or big harvests or money. "I'm letting nature and the trees tell me what is necessary and allowing the land to heal and so I am also healed." ●





**Naomi**  
Muller



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## A 180° CHANGE OF DIRECTION

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At the age of 39, Naomi Muller was the owner of a successful television production company, and an accomplished programme director and news presenter at the SABC, with a highflying fast-paced city lifestyle.

Kobus Maree's book 'Kap die Vuurklip' caused her to pause as it confronted her with the question of whether she was in her sweet spot – a place of work or life in general where she was developing her God-given talents. "I asked my engineer husband

and sons what they thought I should rather be doing if they considered my real passions and talents, and in unison they said: horses," she remembers.

"Now I've always intensely loved horses, but had no regular access to these magnificent horses. During June and December holidays I was able to visit family on their farm between the towns of Vrede and Standerton and counted the weeks until I could again be close to them. But city life was what I knew growing up."



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You cannot simply be in it for the money; you have to love what you do and an aptitude for your line of business sure helps.

“Now I was on the brink of turning forty and wanted to opt for a career involving horses. Shortly after this realisation, my husband was transferred to Oranjemund in Namibia and I would not be able to continue with my current line of work. And so came my opportunity to change direction.” Naomi entered for a horse mastership course and completed her practical sessions at the stables outside of town. Once a month she would come to Paarl to an equestrian training centre. “I just wanted to learn everything there was to know about horses,” she says. “I was also taught to ride correctly according to the British standards.”

The world of endurance riding captured her interest and after renting a horse for a while, Naomi bought her first own Arab called Nakita. “For five years my groom and I travelled throughout Namibia for endurance rides and after four years I was first on the Fédération Equestre Internationale rankings.” (Author’s note: I asked, ‘The women’s list’? No indeed, the world list for men and women!) Naomi’s proficiency with the training of horses for this extreme sport soon spread throughout the riding world and soon thereafter she sold her first horse to a sheikh from the Middle East.



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I'm a woman, but in this case a businesswoman!





### From the back of a horse to great heights

Today Naomi has 30 horses of differing ages on the farm (nine of which are actively being trained for endurance rides) and two permanent grooms to help care for them. The endurance sport is very active in South Africa with at least four of these challenging national events held on a monthly basis. It is also a favourite pastime for the French and Arabs – it's not called the sport of sheikhs for nothing.

### More than a business

"You cannot simply be in it for the money; you have to love what you do and an aptitude for your line of business sure helps. It's like green fingers for someone who specialises in growing vegetables."

According to Naomi her previous career prepared her somewhat for the pressures she now faces: "It made me streetwise and enables me to now handle the challenges I face." "There should be no compromise when it comes to the quality of your export product," she says. "Honesty and integrity should be the kingpins of your business. The word of mouth from your clients is the single most valuable marketing instrument."

After five years she started to seriously breed with Arabs, train them and then sell them to others as enthusiastic about the sport as she was. In the meantime Naomi attained her Springbok Colours, partook in six world championships and got to know the ins and outs of this industry.





"I started the business partly because I needed to start funding my hobby," she says.

Naomi's husband was offered a job in Hermanus and they were able to buy a piece of land outside Stanford. "For the first time I could now bring all my horses together on my own land and start building a stud little by little.

At that time this was a world of men, but I knew that if I focused on what I was good at, I would make it.

However, it is true that the higher you climb the more hostile the wind becomes. It's not a gender issue, simply the way it is in business."

Doing business with men from the Middle East and elsewhere in the world has taught her valuable lessons about business. "But for me the most important principles are to be completely honest about the quality of your product, to build a real relationship and set boundaries as a woman." ●





**Nomonde**  
Kweza





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## AGRICULTURE IN HER BLOOD

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It is easy to ascertain why Nomaxesibe Nomonde Kweza of the Ulimo Lwethu Food Garden in Gugulethu is frequently elected to take the lead in her community.

A seemingly unshakable self-esteem, a strong opinionated voice and a childhood rooted in agriculture have thoroughly prepared her for her current role.

In 2014 Nomonde was named the Western Cape Female Entrepreneur of the Year in the subsistence category.

Nomonde Kweza's interest in agriculture was ignited by an inspirational grandmother who was a horse- and cattle farmer in the Eastern Cape, selling to farmers in Port Elizabeth and Elliot.





We love working this land. It really brings deep satisfaction to connect with nature and to be able to produce fresh vegetables to meet my household needs.

"I very much wanted to attend the Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute, but during those days of Apartheid it was not to be." A lack of access to formal training did not deter her and for a long time she grew vegetables in her back yard and shared her knowledge with others wanting to do the same. For some twenty years she helped create vegetable gardens in the different townships of Gugulethu, Philippi and Nyanga.

In 2008 she started to look for a piece of land that she could call her own. She approached the City of Cape Town and the Department of Social Development for help. "I experienced that they all wanted to make a contribution, but that the different officials were not talking to one another," she remembers. "As I know the farmers in the area, the City of Cape Town asked that we form a farmers' forum and that I should facilitate it.





You could say I was born and bred in agriculture; it was not something I just chose to augment a salary – I always knew that I would be a farmer of some sort.





This process has resulted in a smooth flow of communication and everyone knows which role to play and what contribution to make.” Nomonde has also created a database of the farmers, “as a group we now have a voice!”

Through assistance from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture and various other departments, Nomonde and seven others were granted the lease of a piece of land measuring 0,3ha and received a container, tools and seedlings. “We love working this land. It really brings deep satisfaction to connect with nature and to be able to produce fresh vegetables to meet my household’s needs. It has also

enabled me to be financially independent,” she says. The members of the Ulimo Lwethu Food Garden sell their produce to the local police station, clinic, two primary schools and the nearby SASSA office. “We also deliver to 15 households and a middleman fetches boxes every week for distribution in Blou-bergstrand.”

Farming even on such a small scale is not without its headaches. “We continually have to guard against pests eating away at our products,” she says. “And then sometimes the frustration of waiting for promised assistance for long periods ... you know, the seasons wait for no one.”





When tasting her crispy green beans and seeing the lush potted spinach just ready for the picking, there is no doubt that her family and the clients lucky enough to buy from her, receives only the most deliciously organic vegetables. "My boys can now enjoy healthy salads right through the week and not only during

weekends as is the custom of most people without access to their own fresh vegetables." Walking away with a bunch of recently harvested red onions, one is left with the impression of Nomonde as a proud yet compassionate woman, sharing her knowledge of agriculture with anyone willing to learn. ●





**Reni**  
Hildenbrand



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## LUXURIOUS LIQUIDS

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"I'm a South African," says Reni Hildenbrand with that distinct German lilt to her accent.

This petite lady doesn't seem to fit the bill of a farmer, but upon hearing the scale on which she produces wine and olive oil, one is thoroughly convinced of her prowess as commercial farmer. From her Wellington farm some 60,000 bottles of wine are exported mainly to Thailand and Germany, and 2,000l of olive oil find their way to Germany and into the local market.

"Farming was always what I wanted to do," she says. "From the age of 16 my uncle used to take me to wine tastings and the art of it fascinated me. Sadly I was not allowed to study in that direction so chose architecture instead."

In 1984 Reni followed her husband to Johannesburg. "When he died in a car accident four years later, it literally changed the direction of my life. I sold my business and my house and bought Rhebokskloof outside Wellington.



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Now remember I came to this valley with serious labels: woman, “uitlander” (foreigner) and definitely NOT a farmer.

It has everything that I ever dreamed of: a historic homestead (built in 1782), ancient oak trees, I can see the mountains, the sunset and sunrise and it even has a little stream. It just had no vineyards when I first laid eyes on it.” What didn’t feature in her dreams, though, were the 800 olive trees.

In 1993 Reni started planting Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards, followed by Chardonnay, Semillon, Shiraz and Malbec. The cellar, dating back to 1853, had to

be completely restored. During the period of waiting for the vineyards to come into production, the olive trees continued to bear fruit. Reni spent three months in Tuscany to learn about olive oil, imported an olive oil press and in 1996 made her first olive extra virgin olive oil. “I think they gave this German and English speaker three months to pack her bags. Things have changed and I feel I’m accepted all round; I think the Afrikaans “boere” (farmers) are even proud of what I’ve achieved.”







### Equal passions: olive oil and wine

When Reni does something, she does it in overdrive. Consequently she attained an olive oil taster certificate in Italy, is now certified as a panel leader, wrote a book on Olives and Oils in South Africa, co-initiated the SA Olive competition, won several awards with her own olive oil and was recently inaugurated as an international judge. "I'm equally passionate about the olive oil and the wine; at the moment I just feel I need to spend more of my time helping to build the olive oil industry in South Africa." Reni currently produces olive oil from 3,500 trees.

Her wine exports to Germany, Thailand, Switzerland and lately Namibia are the mainstay of the farm. "Selling the product in a very competitive world,

among major brands that are very well-known, is extremely difficult. I'm not a famous golf- or rugby player," Reni says with a wink, "and wine from Wellington will always experience a small drawback compared to wine from Stellenbosch or Franschhoek, but you will find success if you have a product which is honest and not interfering with nature."

Reni's soft spot for mistreated animals culminated not only in her farm being home to saved donkeys, horses, cattle, goats, cats, dogs and geese; she also annually produces wine ranges dedicated to them. Coconut and Angel are two feline friends who inspired an unusual white-red blend 2013 Chardonnay Malbec.





“Coconut had only eight lives left when she was rescued from a wine tank and Angel was a wild vineyard discovery and together their personalities are personified in the wine.” The Roikat (her spelling) Shiraz pays tribute to a lynx that used to steal her ducks. “One night I slept out there with them and woke at 02:00 in the morning from the noise and looked into the eyes of a rooikat with a dead duck in her mouth. I took that duck right from its mouth and told her that I would get back at her for killing so many of my animals.” Nature Conservation caught her here on the farm soon after – with the dead duck as lure – and released her elsewhere.

Although Reni has a healthy relationship with her three permanent workers, she acknowledges that the

current labour issues (especially regarding seasonal labour) is the one thing which she would warn would-be farmers about. “Sadly more farmers are employing mechanisation during the harvest season to avoid the possible labour problems, but I will not give up on the people, despite the stress. I’ve always said, if times are tough, rather scale down than give up completely.”

Notwithstanding the normal hardships related to a career in agriculture, Reni loves the daily challenges. “Despite the fact that we’ve received far less rain than usual, the vineyards are looking absolutely beautiful. Maybe a bit of stress is good for the grapes – they’re perhaps like me: stress makes me perform even better.” ●





Mama  
**Tenjiwe**  
Kaba

2015 National Winner: Best Substance Producer





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## TOWNSHIP GREENS

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It is early morning in Khayelitsha and people and taxis are mill around, creating quite a din. Within minutes of reaching the Moya We Khaya Community Garden one's perception of this township – one of Cape Town's largest – as a place defined by poverty and unemployment is dashed. Khayelitsha, meaning 'new home', is also home to several thriving community gardens, most often led by strong women.

The Moya We Khaya Community Garden, meaning 'spirit of home', comprises 1 hectare subdivided in neatly arranged vegetable plots. At the head of the operation you'll find Tenjiwe Christina Kaba, a formidable opinionated woman with a vast experience in the establishment and management of food gardens in the township.



The Moya We Khaya Community Garden is listed on [www.SA-venues.com](http://www.SA-venues.com) as one of 7 Cape Town community gardens that are setting the trend. It was also identified as a 2014 World Design Capital project.

Mama Kaba, as she is respectfully called, is also the chairperson of the well-known Manyanani Peace Park. Her Grade 2 education and years of being a house worker have not deterred her from now leading others on the road towards food security and financial independence.

In 1989 Abalimi Bezekhaya (a NGO attempting to alleviate poverty and create self-employment through gardening and micro farming in the townships of Cape Town) recruited Mama Kaba for their team of trainers. Today she is a co-director of this successful establishment. The story of the development of this particular garden actually started with the need for a swimming pool. "Children were drowning in nearby dams and the community wanted a pool," Mama Kaba tells. "In 1995 when the next door peace

park was launched, I asked the mayor for this piece of land and he said: 'You can have it', but without signed contracts this was of course not the case."

A tourist visiting Abalimi was so inspired by the need that he promised to raise the money for the pool. He succeeded in raising R50 000, but then the municipality decided that the venue was not ideal for a swimming pool due to the chaos and noise it would generate. A pool was consequently built near the courthouses in the proximity of trains and taxis to enable more people to have access to it. "I was still worried about this empty piece of land because women were often raped here," Mama Kaba remembers. "People in this area did not have jobs and food on the table and the idea of a food garden suddenly made complete sense."





People call us subsistence farmers and it is the truth - these gardens give people a means of survival, an income and food on the table.





This time round Mama Kaba made sure that she knocked on the right doors to secure the land. In November 2013 the land was officially made available for this purpose and Abalimi and Rotary pitched in to supply the four men and six actively participating women with the necessary infrastructure, including a fence, container, water supply and a tunnel. The Western Cape Department of Agriculture contributed tools, manure and seedlings and in February 2014 the garden was operational.

“The men and women working the land are each responsible for their own plots. In this way no one can

simply stay away and at the end of the month claim part of the group’s earnings,” she says. “On Mondays and Tuesdays we harvest and each one’s harvest is packed in a crate bearing his or her name. The crates are then delivered to the Abalimi pack shed in Philippi from where it is packed and marketed.” Participants earn up to R4, 000 a month from their plots and are able to put food on the table for their extended families. “For many this is the first time that they even own a bank card and at the end of the month when the SMS’s of payments come through, you can hear their happy exclamations where they’re working in the garden.”





Mama Kaba is working on an idea to obtain the next-door land for a similar project involving the youth. "They don't necessarily want to work in a food garden for the food, they want a salary," she says. "We can now show them that this is possible. I will not be their leader, but will guide them and share the experience we have gained over the years."

Zodwa Thomas-Saweti is one of the women working this garden. She works full-time for the NGO Rape Crisis, but before and after work you'll find her in the garden, hose or spade in hand. "This is so rewarding," she gushes. "I never have to buy vegetables anymore and the taste of our organically grown vegetables is just so much better than store-bought ones. Working with these women is the highlight of my day."

Mama Kaba (fondly called 'the loud one' by Zodwa) is still full of impressive plans. "After my time with Abalimi ends in 2018 I will continue to be a consultant to anyone who wants to farm. Perhaps we'll build a B&B so that people can stay over here."

In 2015 Mama Kaba and the Moya We Khaya Community Garden were acknowledged for the example they set by being awarded the provincial and national title of Female Entrepreneur in the Subsistence category of the competition. "This was a huge motivation for us and others, especially those who think that agriculture is nothing." With the prize money the group bought another container for a kitchen where they can start growing sprouts for salads. No end in sight for this group of dedicated men and women with Mama Kaba at the helm. ●





**Wadea**  
Jappie



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## NOT ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET

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Upon meeting with female farmer Wadea Jappie on their farm Chamomile in Philippi (Cape Flats), one immediately becomes aware of the challenges she faces on a daily basis.

Someone has stolen the neighbourhood power cables during the night, cutting off the electricity supply to her hen houses – home to 10,000 laying hens.

“The production levels of the hens immediately drop due to the subsequent lack of lighting,” she explains. It also means that she is unable to irrigate her 18ha of vegetables and herbs. But her farm’s name means

‘strength in adversity’ and Wadea portrays an internal strength of character that defies all hardships.

Learning at the knee of her father, a businessman owning several businesses, Wadea always knew that she would be an entrepreneur. Initially she sold a few dozen eggs a week to immediate family and friends. Then coffee shops and small bakeries. Soon the demand for Chamomile’s eggs grew beyond her wildest dreams and with a lifetime of exposure to the principles of planning, perseverance and sound entrepreneurial work discipline she was able to expand to meet the demand.





Our grandchildren will be able to say, ‘my grandparents had a tractor’, but our business will only reach its full potential after we have gone. We are laying the foundations and creating a legacy for generations to come. I see them as business people within the agricultural value chain. We are planting the seeds of their future success.

Wadea believes in doing things right – even if it takes longer. While she has been farming on their 1.6 hectare land for a long time, she had to stop with the egg production in 2011 pending an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study. At that stage she had 3,000 layers. The EIA was completed towards the end of 2013 and with assistance from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Wadea was

able to install a fully automated chicken house which currently houses 10 000 chickens. “We were fortunate to land a 3-year contract with Windmeul Eggs for 9,500 eggs a day,” she says. “Although one could get a higher price on the open market, we need this structured income to effectively cover our debt.” Her vision is to expand this side of the business to include 30,000 layers.



“

You have to cut your pants according to the size of your cloth. Start with what you have and beware of accumulating too much debt.





### Philippi – Cape Town's veggie basket

The sandy soil of Philippi has for generations been home to vegetable farmers supplying the ever-increasing demand of a growing city. However, farmers are very aware of the urban edge increasingly encroaching on the agricultural land. "It seems that farmers do not feature high on the city fathers' list of priorities. We might soon have a tractor, but not land on which to farm." The urban sprawl means higher crime levels, making farmers think twice about investing further in their businesses.

From 1.6 hectares Wadea weekly supplies 750kg of fresh danya (coriander) to Shoprite Freshmark, and on 22 ha produces some 6 tons of cauliflower, 6,000 cabbage heads, 5 tons of carrots and a ton of radishes which are packed at the pack shed of a neighbouring commercial farmer on a daily basis. Some of their products are also sold to companies supplying restaurants and hotels, to the Epping market and smaller hawkers. (According to a rental arrangement with the Department of Rural Development, the Jappie family are able to utilise the additional land.)





"We've come to realise that the time is right for us to start adding value to our products," Wadea explains. "The feedback that we receive regarding the quality of our products is always extremely positive and we are certified by PPECB, South Africa's official export certification agency for the perishable produce industry. We are in the process of putting up our own pack shed to be able to process and pack our own produce – a whole new challenge." "It is extremely rewarding to grow your own ingredients and to see your products proudly displayed in the shops. I am a farmer.

I love the routine of planting and harvesting and the fact that we're a family business, working together towards a common goal."

In 2006 Wadea won the Western Cape Female Entrepreneur of the Year for Informal Markets, in 2009 the Agricultural Writers Association's Emerging Farmer of the Year award and again in 2010 the Female Entrepreneur of the Year award for small-holders – perfect praise for a woman who finds her strength in adversity. ●





But the golden thread running through these stories – and most probably through the stories of all the other women making a living through agriculture – is woven with tenacity, a love of nature and an attitude of ‘Yes, I am a woman; why NOT agriculture?’



## CHARLENE NIEUWOUDT

# AUTHOR'S NOTES

Women in agriculture is not a new concept. In fact, in ancient times it was the women who worked the fields. So why the need for a book heralding the achievements of sixteen women, you might ask? To acknowledge the fact that for a long time women struggled to be heard, to be taken seriously. Yes, there have always been strong women with a passion for agriculture who were determined to make this male dominated environment their career, but this book celebrates all those women who have stuck it out. Who needed to be activists for the sake of paving the way for others to follow. Who have earned the respect of their male counterparts through sheer hard work and dedication.

When the Female Entrepreneur of the Year competition was presented for the first time in 1999, the

Department had to search far and wide to find women who farmed in their own right. The competition had to clearly draw the distinction between being a farmer's wife and being a female farmer. The hardships of being a woman in agriculture was a subject often raised during the adjudication interviews. After spending time on the farms of these women, I have come to the conclusion that things have indeed changed. It has been heartening to hear that while most of them have in the past experienced some challenges related to being a woman working in this sector; most of them feel that they no longer have to fight quite as hard. Some have realised that it is all right to work side-by-side with their husbands, partners and extended families, forging strong teams, enabling everyone to apply their individual strengths. For some the road to success is still a solitary one. ■

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