

# ABUNDANT HARVEST

Covid-19 : Warriors of Hope



Western Cape  
Government  
FOR YOU





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# ABUNDANT HARVEST

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Covid-19

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# INTRODUCTION

Dr. Mogale Sebopetsa, Head of Department

When the first case of COVID-19 was detected in South Africa on 5 March 2020, many did not anticipate the effect and the monumental demand it will place on the agricultural sector to not only provide to our food system, but also to create a sense of hope to our citizens.

It seemed harder and almost impossible in the early days of COVID-19, for any meaningful economic activity as the virus disrupted 'normal life' as we knew it.

Albeit our agri workers and producers went about demonstrating their 'labour of love' for our citizens. This book is about acknowledging and celebrating our Warriors of Hope who made a super-human effort, to respond to the call to create hope and protect what matters most to life – FOOD.

This Abundant Harvest: CCOVID-19 edition tells a story of a resilient, thriving agricultural sector that understand its place and its centrality to the economy of the Western Cape. This sector took it upon itself to respond to the Western Cape's key priorities, namely: Jobs, Safety and Wellbeing.

It also tells a story of partnerships and collaboration between the Western Cape Department of Agriculture and its partners aimed at delivering positive outcomes to our citizens. It was through this collaboration that hope became real for our citizens.

Over 1 300 jobs were saved within the wine tourism sector when a ban on alcohol sales was imposed, over 5 000 households were supported with the means to produce own food and farmers donated produce to support our humanitarian relief efforts.

This is true to the Western Cape's values and the whole of our society and of government's approach to finding solutions.

Although the COVID-19 years were very onerous, one is encouraged by what had been achieved and more

importantly the lessons harvested on how to respond to future disrupters.

As in the words of John Maxwell – 'teamwork makes the dream work, but a vision becomes a nightmare when the leader has a big dream and a bad team'.

The commitment, dedication and support shown by my team at the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) is an outstanding demonstration of civil service at its best. During a time when we needed leadership and courage, they stepped in and this to me, shows how invaluable it is to have a team that has a call for duty instead and completely obsessed with the citizens. You are simply the BEST and worthy of praise for your unflinching commitment, well done!

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture remains committed to unlocking the full potential of agriculture, to enhance the economy, ecology and social wealth for YOU, our citizens.

And we do this through partnership and collaboration with our stakeholders.

I now invite you to enjoy this once in a lifetime edition of the Abundant Harvest, Warriors of Hope, #fortheloveofagriculture.







# FOREWORD

Dr. Ivan Meyer

Abundant Harvest – COVID-19: Warriors of Hope provides insight into what lies behind the success of the agricultural sector.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 in South Africa resulted in significant economic disruptions. Lockdown measures halted economic operations and the movement of people. In addition, the pandemic exposed the vulnerability of international supply chains and domestic food systems.

Throughout this period, the agricultural sector continued to exude optimism. This hopefulness runs like a golden thread through each of the stories. Optimism fueled enthusiasm and inspired men and women within the industry to spread the message of hope. By doing so, they confirmed and acknowledged each other's humanity.

The stories also challenge the pessimists amongst us to work on becoming an optimist. They dare us to maintain a gentle determination that will allow us to focus on potential alternatives and find solutions during adversity.

The optimists in these stories hold onto hope – they do not ignore the reality and consequences of COVID-19. However, they also do not despair or lose themselves in the turbulence of Covid-19.

The stories highlight that empathy and compassion form the basis of our sense of human connection. It opens doors in difficult or hopeless situations. It lays the platform for partnerships and collaboration.

As was the case with Day zero, the campaign launched in response to the possibility of Cape Town becoming the first city in the world to run out of Water, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the power of the Western Cape's interdepartmental and a whole of society approach.

The Western Cape successfully managed the pandemic by focusing on case management, testing and treatment, quarantine and isolation, civil compliance, humanitarian relief, food security, and economic recovery. Abundant Harvest – COVID-19: Warriors of Hope capture how the approach played out in the communities we serve.

The Western Cape Government has six core values: caring, competence, accountability, integrity, innovation and responsiveness.

Each story captures the Western Cape's values and the brand promise of optimism and worth.

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture does what it does for you, the people we serve. We deliver tangible benefits that bring hope to your lives and your community.

Hope is tangible in agriculture.

[#fortheloveofagriculture](#)







# GIVING POWER





## AGRI-WORKERS – FROM VULNERABLE TO ENABLED

Agri-workers counted amongst one of the country's most vulnerable groups during a time when South Africa was in the grips of the coronavirus.

All South Africans, at some stage, felt overwhelmed by the ever-changing and often ambiguous COVID-19 restrictions imposed by Government at regular intervals. Following each address to the nation by President Cyril Ramaphosa, people were scouring the news channels to find explanations and

clarity about what may and what may not be. Limited access to dependable information compounded their already negative experience of the pandemic. As a way of addressing this, Agri Western Cape assisted producers to help navigate the labyrinth of fake news and misinterpretations for their workers by developing and distributing infographics that conveyed the most important information in easy-to-understand pictograms – especially relevant to their agricultural environment.



During my visits to these home gardens, I have witnessed teamwork, joy and even moments of real fun in the families.  
– Dr. Ivan Meyer, Western Cape Minister of Agriculture

### ONE HOME, ONE GARDEN

Another very real consequence of the pandemic and the various levels of lockdown was temporary or permanent job losses, sometimes leaving households without any income and therefore, with no food on the table. The idea for the One Home One Garden campaign was the brainchild the Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Ivan Meyer, as one way of addressing food insecurity in the province – even before COVID-19 hit. Funds were initially made available to establish some 1 800 gardens per year. The aim was to assist households to be able to produce enough food to meet basic household food security needs throughout the year. When COVID-19 intensified the need for nutritious food, the Provincial Government made more funds available to enable the Department to establish more than 5 000 gardens a year.

“In addition to having access to health-boosting vegetables, it was also evident that home gardening was relaxing and stimulating during that difficult period. During my visits to these home gardens, I have witnessed teamwork, joy and even moments of real fun in the families. Through these food gardens we were seeing our motto of #fortheLoveofAgriculture in action in various communities,” concluded Dr. Meyer. “Communities were connecting to agriculture, experiencing the satisfaction of reaping what you’ve sown.”

The Department's approach was three-fold:

household gardens, larger community gardens and school gardens. According to Jerry Arries of the WCDoA's Advisory and Extension Services, the Municipalities, ward councillors, other provincial government departments, NGOs, and religious-based organisations assisted them in identifying indigent households, which were mostly situated in the so-called COVID-19 hotspots. “The first criteria to qualify for assistance stipulated that a household had to have a monthly income of less than R4 500,” says Arries. “Another condition was that people qualifying for assistance had to attend compulsory training. In this way, a success rate of around 70% has been achieved.” Initial training is continuously augmented by visits from extension officers and local community mentors with experience in food gardening. “We’ve found that WhatsApp groups offer an efficient solution and participants receive immediate assistance on a variety of subjects, including how to handle pests and plagues.”

Arries explains that the food garden package ranges between R800 and R3 500 depending on the scale of the project and whether a water tank for water harvesting or a grey water system was to be included. In addition, each garden received seedlings (at least four different vegetables befitting the area and the season), compost and fertiliser, and basic gardening equipment. An alternative to the gardening concept – where municipal bylaws allow – comprises the establishment of a laying hen project consisting of 8-12 hens and two months' worth of food.

Says Jerry Arries, “The COVID-19 crisis might very well be something of the past, but malnutrition is





rife in some communities and there are still so many people that go to bed hungry. We cannot help them all. Establishing home food gardens is one solution, but it need not only be a government-driven project. This is something that civil society could very easily help us to take forward – building a nutritious future for all, one seedling at a time. Imagine the impact it would have!”

The Department developed an online toolkit for the agricultural sector, containing information about the nationwide lockdown and how it relates to agriculture, including protocols and guidelines regarding the transport of seasonal agri-workers, and health and safety in the workplace.







Jannie Strydom – Chief Executive Officer, Agri Western Cape

## ORGANISED AGRICULTURE ONE VOICE

### CELEBRATE THE GOOD

To find meaning in a global crisis like this pandemic, one must reflect, evaluate, and learn, but one must also identify and honour the good that happened. One such positive outcome for AgriWesternCape (AWC) is the improved relationship forged with the provincial departments of Agriculture and Health. “We received incredible support from these institutions,” Strydom remembers, “and a new level

of trust was established.” According

to Strydom the Department of Health assisted in identifying risks and offering advice of how to act proactively. “They quickly realised that people in the rural areas did not have the same level of access to medical care or to sites where the vaccine was being administered as their metropole counterparts. They consequently set up mobile clinics to address this



We received incredible support from these (government) institutions and a new level of trust was established. Moving closer to each other and better understanding each other’s roles resulted in improved relationships and greater respect for our different challenges. – Jannie Strydom

challenge. We also want to especially commend the Western Cape Department of Agriculture for the way in which they continuously assisted us with the interpretation of regulations enforced on national level.” Strydom continued to laud the provincial government for the impressive functioning of its disaster management centre and its proactive and decisive support in all spheres.

According to Strydom the role of organised agriculture was tested like never before. “We’ve always carried the responsibility of representing our members and carrying their needs forward; serving as go-between between our producers and government, and COVID-19 affirmed our place in the sector.” AWC and its members also embraced the new way of connecting and communicating, and even moved their annual congress where leadership are appointed and decisions ratified, online. “As elsewhere, ‘you’re on mute’ was regularly heard during our Zoom and MS Teams meetings, and people had to learn the protocol and etiquette of this new format. But I’m grateful to say that even the more senior farmers, soon came on board. These producers epitomize agility and adaptability, and we honour them for that.”

“On a personal level I became intensely aware of how extensive the value chain in agriculture is,” he says. “With the alcohol ban, we saw the numerous secondary businesses which are dependent on agriculture in some way or another. Think of garden services for wine tourism establishments, labelling and bottling businesses, packaging suppliers and more. And a chain is just as strong as its weakest link – therefore we need to pull together in order to face whatever lies ahead for this sector.”

Jannie Strydom’s assessment of the Department’s performance during COVID-19 aligns with the findings of an external evaluation of the WCDoA’s response to COVID-19. \*Key enabling aspects underpinning the Department’s response included well established trust relationships with sector clients and stakeholders (including across government spheres), clear, decisive, effective and agile organisational leadership operating within a distinct and supportive ‘WCDoA culture’, existing integrated risk management and continuous improvement disciplines and processes, and recent experience in dealing with previous disaster situations, especially the 2015-2018 drought. \*April 2022 | Blue North – Evaluation: The WCDoA’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic

For AWC and their members it was by no means just a case of survival and the caring heart of agriculture was evident in many projects of support for those less fortunate. Through the FoodForwardSA movement, for example, its members donated more than one hundred tonnes of fresh produce to those in need.





## ALCOHOL BAN: JOINING VOICES FOR REASON

As a result of the national alcohol ban, the South African wine industry found itself at “the edge of a cliff with thousands of livelihoods endangered and many wine businesses, especially smaller companies and those recently established businesses without the time to build financial resources, facing potential closures due to recurring domestic wine sales restrictions.” In a media release at the time, Vinpro managing director, Rico Basson, added, “The liquor ban is not only about whether people are allowed to enjoy their favourite drink or not. It is about keeping businesses afloat that put food on the table for

thousands of families. It is certainly not viable to cut off an entire industry’s lifeline every time there is a spike in infections.”

Like with the stipend approved for wine tourism workers, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) worked closely with industry role players to advocate for the relaxing of the severe and fluctuating alcohol restrictions. “It is well noted that South Africa was the only major wine exporting country in the world where there was a total clampdown on wine sales both locally and

“  
We were the only major wine exporting country in the world where there was a total clampdown on wine sales both locally and globally. – Dr. Dirk Troskie

globally,” says Dr. Dirk Troskie, Director: Business Planning and Strategy of the WCDoA. “The wine industries of other wine producing countries could at least still benefit from local sales. We consequently regularly reached out to National Government to share information, provide context and to request amendments to the regulations, basing our proposals on the dire implications for the industry, employment levels, and basic economic survival.”

“The wine industry plays a key role in the Western Cape economy with wine grapes representing more than 50% of the 181 233 hectares under fruit production. Wine is the third largest export product of the Western Cape and contributes 6.5% to the value of exports from this province. It is also estimated that the industry supports the livelihoods of close to 230 000 people,” explains Dr. Troskie. “We had to help.” In seventeen letters to the National Ministry of Agriculture, the Department not only questioned certain alcohol related regulations, but also shared their apprehension and offered meaningful and well-consulted alternatives.

One finds a clear example of how the WCDoA endeavoured to provide the National Government with an industry-relevant perspective when considering the decree that came into effect on 27 June 2021. This announcement banned the sales of liquor for both on- and off-site consumption, while exports were still allowed. It also stated that the transport of liquor was only allowed for export purposes or for the preparation of sanitisers. “Although we were grateful that the export of wine was now allowed to continue, there were other areas for which transport was of vital importance,” Dr. Troskie explained and alluded to a letter from the Department to the National Minister of

Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. “This ruling quite literally excluded transport to storage or bottling plants, to certification bodies as per legislation, as well as the transport of samples to laboratories, potential buyers or to venues where tastings for domestic and international competitions would take place. It is understandable that, with wine production centred in the Western Cape, this information might not have been considered when regulations were being set and we deemed it our responsibility to share these insights.”

It is important to note that the Department did not only advocate for the alcohol and wine tourism industries, but also assisted and petitioned on behalf of other sectors that faced similar challenges. Likewise bottlenecks in ports disrupted exports for all fresh produce; tobacco and flower sales were severely impacted, unforeseen costs related to compliance skyrocketed, and key production, processing, packaging, and logistical facilities continuously lived under the threat of closure due to a COVID-19 outbreak.

### The SA wine industry in context\*

- The SA wine and brandy industry consists of 2 700 wine grape producers, 529 cellars and 92 500 ha of vineyards, creating 269 096 job opportunities throughout the value chain (80 000 of these people work on farms and in cellars).
- It contributes R55 billion, or 1.1% to South Africa’s GDP.
- Wine tourism creates 36 406 job opportunities and directly contributes R2.4 billion to the SA GDP.

\* Macro Economic Impact Study 2019





Rico Basson – Executive Director, VinPro

#### Overview of the stop/start nature of alcohol related Covid-19 regulations:

- 25 March 2020: Prohibition of all domestic sales and export of wine.
- 7 April 2020: Export of wine allowed, but domestic sales still prohibited.
- 16 April 2020: Transport of all liquor (including wine) prohibited, meaning wine could be exported but not transported to any harbour or airport.
- 29 April 2020: Transport of wine for the export market allowed.
- 28 May 2020: Domestic and export sales allowed.
- 12 July 2020: Domestic sales prohibited (export was still allowed).
- 17 August 2020: Wine sales for off-site consumption allowed (Mondays to Thursdays only) and on-site consumption permitted.
- 17 September 2020: Wine sales for off-site consumption allowed including Fridays.
- 14 December 2020: Sales for off-site consumption allowed during limited hours; wineries in limited hours (not Sundays).

- 17 December 2020: Allow wineries to sell for off-site consumption for seven days a week.
- 29 December 2020: Ban on sales of liquor for on- and off-site consumption (export still allowed).
- 1 February 2021: Wine sales for off-site consumption allowed for limited hours (Mondays to Thursdays) and on-site consumption permitted from 10:00 to 22:00.
- 28 February 2021: Wine sales allowed for off and on-site consumption.
- 30 March 2021: Sales ban on sales for off-site consumption over Easter Weekend; on-site consumption allowed.
- 15 June 2021: Wine sales allowed for off-site consumption for limited hours (Mondays to Thursdays) and on-site consumption outside curfew hours; wineries, wine farms, micro-breweries and micro-distilleries allowed to sell for on- and off-site consumption outside curfew hours.
- 27 June 2021: Sales ban on liquor for on- and off-site consumption (export still allowed); transport only allowed for export purposes or for preparation of sanitisers.







## WINE TOURISM: DIGNITY RESTORED

One of the characteristics of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit South Africa in the first quarter of 2020 was the unexpected, often unintended, but almost always distressing consequences it held for certain industries. In the Western Cape, the wine and tourism industries staggered under liquor trade bans and lockdown restrictions, including a five-week ban on wine exports and the intermittent 23-week prohibition of domestic wine sales. This trade restriction, together with a strict travel ban

which started on 26 March 2020, cost the industry an estimated R5.7 billion\* in direct sales. (\*Includes retail wine sales, but not potential recovery in sales). Marisah Nieuwoudt, Vinpro wine tourism manager, confirmed at the time: "The South African wine industry, and specifically wine tourism, was without a doubt one of the agricultural sectors hardest hit by COVID-19 restrictions in the Western Cape." Vinpro, a non-profit company representing some 2 600 South African wine producers, cellars, and industry

The difference that the wine tourism stipend made to our sector has become even more apparent over time as the world gradually exited the pandemic. – Marisah Nieuwoudt, Vinpro

stakeholders, liaises closely with Government and industry role-players on issues that have an impact on the profitability and sustainability of its members and the industry as a whole.

A survey performed by Vinpro in July 2021 (\*Impact of Covid-19 on the Wine Value Chain Survey) among 549 wine grape producers, wineries and other wine-related businesses, found that while 58% would at that stage have had to make drastic changes to be able to overcome the challenges related to COVID-19, 22% indicated that they would in all probability be able to survive at all. Even following the reopening of the wine trade, many businesses remained crippled by financial challenges, including price pressure due to higher stock levels and delayed payments. Forty-six percent of Black-owned brands and farms believed that their businesses would not be able to survive the next year. Respondents indicated that, should the ban continue for six weeks past 11 July 2021, they would only be able to honour 51% of their normal monthly payroll, whereas for Black-owned wine brands and farms, this figure would come down to 31%, safeguarding only one third of their staff.

## STIPEND RESTORED DIGNITY AND BROUGHT RELIEF

During this crisis, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) affirmed the economic importance of this industry and prioritised agritourism as an important sector for the province's economic recovery strategy. "We recognise that

a major portion of industry players' revenue is generated from domestic wine sales, and especially smaller and Black-owned wineries and brands are heavily reliant on sales channels such as tasting rooms and their extended hospitality offering," said Dr Mogale Sebopetsa, Head of the WCDoA. "For this reason, we deemed it critical to support this industry in a tangible way."

In response to the calls for help from Vinpro and its partners in wine, tourism and agriculture, the WCDoA granted an amount of R12 million for a Wine Tourism Worker Support Stipend. This very welcome gesture enabled 1 362 wine tourism workers at 254 wineries, to survive the financial restraints caused by the debilitating lockdown and other trade restrictions.

For the purposes of this project, wine tourism workers were defined as "wine and food service employees permanently employed in a winery tasting room in the Western Cape province". The stipend of R3 000 per person per month for three consecutive months brought a spark of light to an otherwise very bleak festive season. Each winery, including but not limited to Vinpro members, were able to claim for existing and permanent employees.

A total number of 1 467 applications for funding were received and these were screened in line with the primary purpose of the stipend and successful authentication of supporting documents, and preference was given to applicants in line with the Department of Agriculture's gender criteria. Two thirds of wine tourism workers supported by the fund were female, more than half qualified as youth (age 18 – 34 years) and nearly three quarters were people of colour.





The stipend aimed to safeguard the continuous employment of workers by subsidising their salaries during the main quarter of the tourism calendar. The months of December to February generally see an influx of local and international tourists streaming to the Cape for, amongst others, a Winelands and wine experience, generating an income which, in many ways, carries these businesses through the quieter months. COVID-19 negated that scenario and put numerous livelihoods at risk.

“The difference that the wine tourism stipend made to our sector has become even more apparent over

time as the world gradually exited the pandemic. When other tourism industries have battled crippling staff shortages in the wake of COVID-19, our wineries were able to retain the majority of their permanent wine tourism workers. This enabled us to focus on skills development programmes leading up to our 2021 and 2022 high seasons, investing in our long-serving wine tourism workers to ensure their development and our sector’s readiness for the return of our domestic and international visitors,” says Marisah Nieuwoudt, Wine Tourism Manager at Vinpro.







## ETHICAL EXPORT ENABLERS NOT DAUNTED BY PANDEMIC

As with all facets of business and life in general, the global pandemic had a significant impact on agricultural exports, with farms and packing facilities, transport providers, harbours, shipping operators and international markets coming under extreme pressure. Fortunately, agriculture was deemed an essential part of the economy (food is life, after all) and therefore had the operational go-ahead despite severe and ever-changing restrictions. Two of the key players in the export value chain, the Sustainability

Initiative of South Africa (SIZA) and the Wine and Agricultural Ethical Trading Association (WIETA), had to plan and act fast to ensure that fresh produce and wine could indeed leave the boundaries of the country and that producers could continue with their seasonal activities.

SIZA facilitates, encourages and monitors sustainable and ethical trade and environmental stewardship in compliance with local and international labour



I suspect overcoming challenges and finding solutions are part of the DNA of everyone in agriculture and we share what we have: resources, ideas, encouragement. – Retha Louw

legislation and market requirements. “Compliance in terms of effective evaluation and international market demand dictates in-person and on-farm audits, and the initial restriction on movement rendered this impossible. SIZA had to promptly adapt its protocols with approval from and to the satisfaction of the market. Failure to do so would prohibit producers from receiving their Audit Completion Letters (certificates of compliance) and therefore loading their produce onto the container vessels, naturally resulting in huge losses,” explains Werner van Dyk, Ethical and Sustainability Audit Manager. The urgently drafted revised health and safety guidelines, incorporating mechanisms to keep workers safe during situations like COVID-19, now form part of the organisation’s disaster management plan. “At the time we had to balance what the market expected and what was possible for producers,” Werner says.

“We had to move more of what we do onto the digital space,” Retha remembers. “And here the Western Cape Department of Agriculture provided valuable assistance in making funding available to enable us to develop eleven online training courses to be presented via a range of free webinars.” These courses addressed important environmental and social legislation and compliance, which previously had to take place in-person. Animated and multilingual training and awareness raising videos available in different languages were created for agri-workers to better explain compliance requirements. These resources were conveniently distributed via WhatsApp for easy access on their phones. Specially developed safe workplace infographics about issues such as hygiene and transport were distributed via social media, by email and the SIZA website. “In cooperation with the industry and the suppliers, we were definitely one of the very few organisations of

this kind in the world that moved so fast and had such a positive impact on the ability of producers and their workers to ride the storm.”

As soon as movement was allowed, although still restricted, SIZA created a hybrid approach with the auditing of paperwork being handled remotely (using Dropbox and MS Teams) and mandatory farm visits then kept as to the point as possible. “During these visits, it was heartening to experience how producers cared for their workers and did all they could to keep them informed and safe.”

Despite its best intentions to continue with its important task, SIZA and its team of third-party auditors also experienced personal losses and forced down-time due to contracting the virus resulting in staff shortages and consequent delays in service delivery. In terms of audit oversight, the availability of adequately trained, qualified and skilled third-party auditors is key to the success of the process. SIZA developed alternative options for its members to ensure audits could continue whilst simultaneously providing sufficient assurance to the buyers. As a result of certain insights obtained during the pandemic, SIZA instituted various new measures to ensure that third-party audit firms maintain high levels of competency.

“Personally, I do not dwell on problems for too long before going into problem-solving mode,” Retha says, “and that was my saving grace. We needed to come up with solutions, keep our staff safe and encouraged and assist the industry to survive this ordeal. That kept me going. I suspect overcoming challenges and finding solutions are part of the DNA of everyone in agriculture and we share what we have: resources, ideas, encouragement, and faith.”





This crisis presented us with an awesome opportunity to put our creative heads together and do something great to empower agri-workers and to build strong community resilience during such a vulnerable period. In some ways, there were actually more participation, deeper connection, and true humanitarianism than before. – Linda Lipparoni



Similarly, WIETA were forced to be as proactive as possible (considering the vast unknown landscape of COVID-19), pre-empting their members' needs and addressing their questions relating to COVID-19's bearing on their industry. WIETA, representing the interests of trade unions, civil society groupings, wine brands and their producers, developed a wide range of industry-specific resources that were visually attractive and used layman's terms to explain difficult concepts. Its website, boasting a new COVID-19 toolkit, became a one-stop go-to hub for many for up-to-date information and valuable resources, enabling them to do business as best possible under the extenuating circumstances.

WIETA CEO Linda Lipparoni remembers, "When we went into the initial lockdown the wine industry was right in the middle of harvest. And suddenly the uncertainty of what was allowed and what was not, how to manage the restrictions and the fluctuating ban on alcohol, had the industry in a vice grip. Agri-workers, especially, struggled to make sense of what was happening. This presented us with an opportunity and right from the start of the lockdown we were busier than ever." The organisation responded, with financial assistance and guidance from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, by developing and disseminating information in various formats and in the three official languages of the province. "We interpreted and developed protocols for the primary and secondary grape and wine industry

and continued with our audits. It seemed, that now more than ever, the markets wanted to know how humanitarian requirements were being met." With the WCDoA's assistance they were also able to develop valuable visual aids, including video and animated training material, which have proven to have a wider reach, today still, than in-person training sessions allowed.

"Once the regulations relaxed, our teams could once again visit the farms and we'd divide the workforce into different sessions to honour the social distancing and group size rules and continue to provide training," she says. "Again, the Department and other partners lent a hand in providing masks and sanitisers for these sessions and for wider distribution on farms. One shouldn't underestimate how even acts like these contributed to the wellbeing of an industry."

"During this time, we experienced the power of strong partnerships and could showcase this uniqueness of our province; government, social society and the private sector successfully pulling together for the greater good. This crisis presented us with an awesome opportunity to put our creative heads together and do something great," says Linda. "I think, in some ways, there were actually more participation and connection than before."





## LENDING A HAND TO SMALL AND BLACK-OWNED WINERIES

“When lockdown struck, we literally went into saving mode – saving businesses, saving people,” says Wendy Petersen, operations manager at the South African Wine Industry Transformation Unit (SAWITU). “Black-owned brand and farm owners had worked hard over the years to stay abreast and to be sustainable in an ever-challenging industry. We could not allow a crisis like this to undo all the hard work.” The lockdown, which prohibited people to visit wine tourism destinations and the intermittent ban on alcohol sales, held serious implications for these small businesses.

The Economic Value of Wine Tourism Study conducted by Vinpro in 2019 pointed out that wine tourism represents 41% of these small business’ total turnover. For this reason, they would inevitably bear the brunt of the pandemic in the worst possible way with insufficient bridging finance to sustain them through the situation.

“Some of the small wine business or farm owners ran a one-woman show so we felt the need to establish channels for connection, to check in with one another and make sure everyone is emotionally, physically and financially all right,” Wendy remembers.



We witnessed the power of women coming together, and the quote ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ was demonstrated in a profound way. – Carmen Stevens

“One of our first steps as an organisation was to ascertain where agri-workers were in need, and we contacted NPOs in the different regions to assist with food hampers. For many, it was about survival. In a way, being busy, and particularly being busy with alleviating the distress of others, fuelled my soul. I once again realised giving and helping blesses the giver and the helper almost in equal measures as the receiver.”

According to Wendy, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture was one of the provincial departments that stepped forward to make a very tangible difference in the form of the well-planned and well-executed Producer and Brand Owner Protection Support Grant. The Department made R13,5 million available to help save wine businesses experiencing COVID-related financial challenges. The submissions had to be based on specifically articulated needs or projects, and they had to prove that their current challenging situation was a direct result of COVID-19.

SAWITU was also able to support members with monthly financial support for a period of nine months to cover overheads and keep the doors open – a true lifeline for many.

On 8 July 2021 Vinpro reported that many wine businesses, and especially smaller companies and those under Black ownership, were facing potential closures due to the recurring and, at that stage, fifth domestic wine sales restrictions.

## LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

While the whole country yearned to move on and forget all that happened during the almost two years under the shadow of the pandemic, it is important to remember the worst in order to appreciate the best. For the members of The Wine Arc, an initiative by SAWITU and a brand home for Black-owned wine brands and entrepreneurs, it was a time to refocus and most importantly, support each other. “The Wine Arc serves as a vehicle for business growth, and we encouraged members to use this time to creatively and strategically assess their business plans, products, branding and markets,” says Wendy. “One could, after all, be paralysed by fear and uncertainty and the sometimes the pure ridiculousness of it all, or you could let the crisis energise you into action. We chose the latter.”

All over the world stories of innovation and entrepreneurship surfaced – no less so from within the ranks of these Black-owned winemakers and farmers. Online wine tastings held during this time with wine businesses in the USA, often at inconvenient hours due to the time zone differences, paid off with the third container of wine from the wine collective now on its way to America.

Another victory resulted from a visit by Jennifer White in 2020, a wine importer for Roots & Vines Wines. Jennifer who has a passion for women’s empowerment, met with the Black-owned brand owners and established export relationships with many of them.





"There were most certainly businesses that almost bled to death," remembers Wendy, "but there are many that have come out on the other side, stronger, and more agile than ever. Especially those that found new innovative ways to remain connected to their clients and consumers, are reaping the benefits now."

## WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, WE GIVE

It is quite significant to note that almost all the members of The Wine Arc (75% are women) were – even in their toughest season – supporting others that were even less fortunate. One such remarkable

woman is Carmen Stevens, SA's very first qualified black wine maker. The Carmen Stevens Foundation provides over 25 000 learners from 125 schools with a daily nutritious breakfast and lunch. Says Carmen Stevens, "COVID-19 brought unity, not just in the industry but also in our communities where assistance with food was an urgent need. We witnessed the power of women coming together, and the quote 'it takes a village to raise a child' was demonstrated in a profound way. And we found innovative ways of selling our beloved product."

"The challenge is to retain this culture of giving and pulling together – even when our nation is not facing a pandemic," says Wendy.





# GIVING POWER







## FOOD IN THE TIME OF CORONA

Despite the devastation COVID-19 caused, it also brought out the best in people. Stories of open hearts and hands abounded and amidst severe restrictions involving social distancing, complete lockdowns and great uncertainty, people and organisations found innovative ways of reaching out to those in need. Food insecurity became a sudden reality for a much larger portion of the population than usual when many households suffered from breadwinners being laid off or losing their jobs permanently.

The deciduous fruit and citrus industries reacted almost instantaneously and generously contributed to the alleviation of hunger and malnutrition by donating fresh fruit to feeding schemes, food banks and other charitable food distribution programmes. Allow us to highlight the initiatives of two industry bodies, Hortgro and the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) and tell their stories.

### HORTGRO PAYING IT FORWARD

In a newsletter written at the start of the pandemic, Elise-Marie Steenkamp, Group Manager: Communications at Hortgro, wrote "COVID-19 figuratively and literally upset the apple cart, grinding the world almost to a total stop. But not the farmers. Donning masks and sanitising hands, they carried on producing. Because without food, the world will really end." She continues: "It seems that nobody can really do anything about ridding the world of this novel coronavirus, but a lot can be done to rid people of hunger." Hortgro is part of Fruit South Africa, a non-profit organisation formed by the CGA to collectively represent pome and stone fruit growers.

As many others in the agricultural industry, Hortgro heeded the President's call for organisations to join forces in alleviating the dire circumstances caused by the crisis. Dr Thembi Xaba, the CEO of the Deciduous Fruit Development Chamber (Hortgro's transformation division), the chairman, Ismail Motala, as well as representatives of the African Farmers of South Africa (AFASA) and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture formed a virtual think tank to discuss solutions. In no time a host of farmers had pledged their support, eager to #payitforward with their fruit. Initial participants included Klein Ezeljacht, Protea Farms, Klipfontein Farms, D&M Packhouse, Motata Farming, Wolseley Fruit Packers, Witzemberf Emerging Farmers, Elandsrivier Farms, Merino Farms, Trevor's Farm, Core Fruit (export company), La Vouere Farm and Kaapschon Farms. Said Dr Mogale Sebopetsa, Head of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture: "A number of these contributing farmers have



"...it serves as the initial platform for future engagements with like-minded partners on how to better respond to a disaster as a collective." – Dr. Thembi Xaba

received support from the past and it's exciting to see them now giving back to communities.

We are indeed better together."







On 23 April 2020 at Derich Priga's D&M Marketing packhouse on Klipfontein Farm, Vyeboom 12 tons of fresh fruit were packed into 12 000 bags to be distributed to the hungry and the homeless. "While this intervention may not begin to address all the socio-economic conditions that the country is faced with right now, it serves as the initial platform for future engagements with like-minded partners on how to better respond to a disaster as a collective," Dr Thembi Xaba said. Another key player, Gift of the Givers, provided the transport for the fruit to be distributed to the various recipient organisations.

When reminiscing about this initiative, Ismail Motala said, "We recognise our role as black producers in our country. The farmers of the Deciduous Fruit Development Chamber of South Africa (DFDC) are thinking beyond their bank accounts, but also about our country. Our country has been there for us over the last 25 years. We have become privileged. Now it is time to give back to those who are not."

"A small group of farmers watched the truck leave, adhering to social distancing rules, although they would have loved to shake hands. Inside that truck was a piece of everyone's soul – the fruit of their labour." - Elise-Marie Steenkamp, Hortgro

On the same day, the WCDoA and the Deciduous Fruit Development Chamber of South Africa (DFDC-SA) handed over 10 000 fruit parcels to the Gift of the Givers for further distribution amongst vulnerable communities in the Western Cape. Gift of the Givers supported more than 20 000 people per day at that stage and these fruit packs were added to the food parcels that they delivered to feeding centres. The Foundation is the largest disaster response non-governmental organisation of African origin on the African continent. The essence of their existence is to bring hope and restore dignity to the most vulnerable. Gift of the Givers has to date managed R4,5 billion in aid in 45 African countries.







Photo credit: ClemenGold

## CITRUS GROWERS WITH HEART

While citrus growers were desperately trying to keep their own workers and the communities in which they operate safe, they also had to fend off global challenges which threatened to cripple their operations. Risks such as citrus not being cleared for export markets due to inspectors falling ill and overseas markets grinding to a standstill; restrictions on the movement of seasonal workers, and staffing

problems at the South African ports, had a serious impact on the local and international movement of their crop. In response, the CGA acted decisively and with great leadership, addressing these challenges with thorough dissemination of valuable information and continuous communication. Within weeks, the Citrus Academy developed a COVID-19 Compliance Officer training manual and trained over 300 compliance officers within the industry.

Simultaneously, these growers were not only thinking of their own bottom line, but in an effort to fulfil what



Said Lukhanyo Nkombisa, General Manager of the CGA Grower Development Company (CGA-GDC): “We are pleased that COVID-19 presented us with the opportunity to strengthen our partnerships with provincial governments in grower regions including Limpopo, the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal.”

they see as their responsibility to contribute towards the country’s food security, they mobilised their Orange Heart Fruit Drive calling on donations from growers linked to the Citrus Growers’ Association. Orange Heart was initiated in 2015 following the first CGA Citrus Summit, and has, since then, been funding local charity organisations, focussing on early childhood development projects, and organisations that empower and support women.

A whopping 1 584 tonnes of fruit were received and distributed nationwide during the 2020 season. In the following year an additional close to 50 tons of fruit reached households in dire need of food and nutrition. “Most of the beneficiary organisation have their own transport to pick up fruit so this made it much easier to arrange from a logistics perspective. After receiving confirmation from us, the beneficiary organisations would go directly to the farmer and pick up fruit using their own trucks,” explains Jacomien de Klerk of the Citrus Academy who administers Orange Heart. “The biggest challenge was that most growers already had their own community-based initiatives in place, so while they were happy to help with the fruit drive, we did not want them to stop these good initiatives, so fruit became scarce after a while.”

Says De Klerk, “This project was incredibly beneficial to communities. We saw first-hand how the beneficiaries were receiving help and were so grateful for the assistance. One of the beneficiary organisations allowed us to assist with putting the parcels together and it was incredibly exciting to be part of the project at this stage.”

In a newsletter, CEO of the CGA, Justin Chadwick, confirmed that citrus growers were overwhelmingly generous in their donations. “Through partnerships with various stakeholders including Food Forward SA, the Department of Social Development, Department of Agriculture and local municipalities, we were able to ensure that these citrus donations reached households most in need during the pandemic.” He said that by contributing towards the nutritional value of the food parcels being distributed to poor communities, we felt we were able to ensure better health outcomes beyond the pandemic. Citrus is known to contain beneficial nutrients, including Vitamin C, and antioxidants which help strengthen the immune system. For this reason, the demand for citrus across all export markets increased significantly during the 2020 season, as consumers looked to boost their health in response to Covid-19.



Photo credit: ClemenGold





## THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS

The COVID-19 pandemic and consequent national lockdowns were destructive on many levels, and for many, feeding their families became an insurmountable task. During a time when nutrition became paramount in warding off the disease and overcoming infections, dairy farmers rose to the occasion and offered to share that with which they earn a living: milk.

Says Philip Blanckenberg, MPO Chairperson at that stage, "The MPO was approached by dairy farmers wishing to contribute towards the government's endeavours to mitigate the effects of the pandemic by donating up to 1% of their daily milk production to feed our most vulnerable and needy members of society. We called it Project One. This was ultimately an indication of the dairy industry's commitment



Shiloh Synergy was the link between the hearts of those who gave, and the hands of the most vulnerable receivers.  
– Estelle Veldman, Shiloh

to stand together against the challenges posed by the pandemic. And it was a stellar example of what is possible when different role-players along the agricultural value chain join hands to make a difference."

The dairy industry and dairy producers themselves were by no means unaffected by the pandemic. As restaurants and fast-food outlets, hotels and guest houses remained closed for prolonged periods, the demand for milk and milk products came to an abrupt standstill resulting in financial pressures along the value chain. While the lockdown did not prevent the production, distribution, and marketing of different types of processed dairy products, the lockdown caused significant spikes in costs incurred on farms and in factories.



Elsenburg (Stellenbosch) and Outeniqua (George), the Western Cape Department of Agriculture's two fully operational dairy research facilities, focusing primarily on milk production research with the aim of bolstering the South African milk producer against the ever-increasing pinch of high input costs. At Elsenburg, with its Holstein herd, scientists focus on the exploration of optimal total mix rations for intensive milk production, while pasture-based milk production receives attention at Outeniqua. Research also focuses on alternative crops, especially those that might prove to be more resistant to higher temperatures and lower rainfall associated with climate change.

There was, however, no doubt that nutrient-rich milk and milk products, which contain essential amino acids and are rich in protein, would contribute greatly to alleviate hunger and help boost the immune systems of those most harshly impacted. The next steps were to invite others to join in and ensure a smooth process from the farm to the table of every recipient.

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) stepped up and donated some 18 000 litres of milk to the value of R100 000 from their two research dairy farms in Stellenbosch and George. "This initiative generated much goodwill and simultaneously served to strengthen relationships between the participating milk producers, government and wider communities," says Dr Chris de Brouwer, Scientific Manager: WCDoA Animal Science Directorate.





## GOODWILL AWAKENS GOODWILL

One often sees that the charitable deeds of one, inspires others to also rise to the occasion. One such praiseworthy effort by dairy farmer Brett Green from the Eastern Cape involved him raising close to R30 000 via his participation in the gruelling SkyRun 100, a self-supported and self-navigated endurance race taking place at average heights of 2 300m above sea level in the Witteberg mountain range. Funds raised in this manner eased the costs involved in transporting the milk from participating farmers to the processors who generously offered their processing and packaging services for free in solidarity with the initiative.

Nestlé and Lactalis (formerly known as Parmalat) converted the fresh milk donations to powdered, UHT (long-life) milk and yoghurt and so successfully lengthened the supply window. “We are unbelievably grateful to our dairy processors that have come on board, as they played a key role,” says Colin Wellbeloved, National Chairman of the MPO. “Everyone knows that this is an expensive part of the process, and we would not have been able to successfully get this project going without their support. Many processors have, in addition, matched or topped the volume of donated milk with a donation from their side as well.”

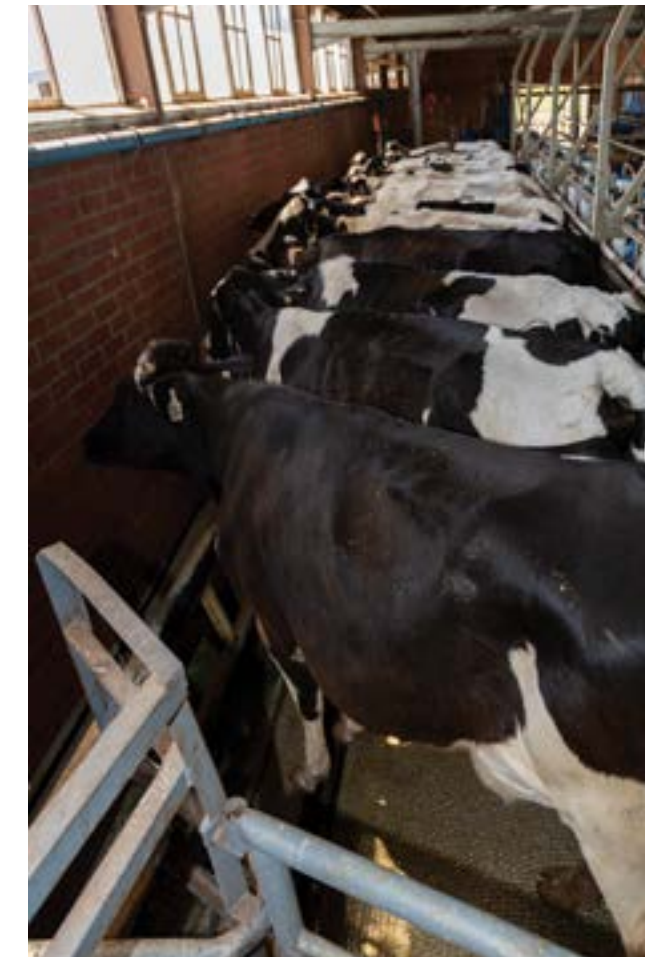
## FORGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOCIAL SOCIETY

Making sure that donations reached the needy was another challenge which was handled successfully in several ways:

- directly from the dairy producer to his/her immediate farmworker and broader community, through already existing reliable and vetted charities that had food supply initiatives in place and where the milk donations could be added to, or

- through farmers’ associations throughout the country supporting their surrounding communities.

“Anyone and everyone in need,” says Colin about the recipients of the donated products. “There was no discrimination with regards to age, race, religion, colour or anything else.”







Minister Ivan Meyer, Estelle Veldman (Shiloh Synergy), Connie Fagan (Lactalis), Philip Blanckenberg (MPO) and Dr Mogale Sebopetsa WCDa Head of Department.



“No person or family should ever go hungry. This donation forms part of the department’s humanitarian relief, especially in the hotspot areas like the Cape Winelands,” said Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Dr Ivan Meyer at the handover ceremony. “We are committed to building a healthy society through playing our role in making available affordable and accessible sources of food.”



Shiloh Synergy was the link between the hearts of those who gave, and the hands of the most vulnerable receivers. – Estelle Veldman, Shiloh

“We’ve long since recognised the value of taking hands with organisations firmly rooted in the communities which we aim to serve together,” says Dr Chris de Brouwer. “As in other instances, there was no need to reinvent the wheel for this project when we could strengthen the hands of reputable non-profit organisations with well-established channels of food distribution.” Two NPOs known for their continued support to local at-risk communities, Life Community Services and Shiloh Synergy, were identified as distributors of the donations.

Shiloh Synergy provides 2 000 to 3 000 hot meals daily to thirty-three community organisations in Cape Town, while Life Community Services reaches out to more than 4 000 orphaned and vulnerable children in impoverished communities of George and surrounds.

Said Estelle Veldman from Shiloh, “We entered unknown territory during the lockdown, but by being classified as an essential service, we continued to produce freshly cooked meals seven days a week, averaging some 1 600 meals per day.” According to Estelle their client base underwent a dramatic change with pre-schools and after care centres closing down. Suddenly they had to provide for care centres for homeless people, temporary sleeping sites at churches for homeless people, and other newly established feeding schemes. “Without the support of the Western Cape Government and the MPO we would have been unable to provide nutritious meals to those who simply could not fend for themselves.”

Maryna de Vries from Life Community Services in George was equally grateful: “In response to the lockdown we launched a nutrition drive before we were able to gain permission to reopen our kitchen. During those initial weeks, with the help of

contributions like this one by the MPO and WCDa, we were able to distribute eggs, fruit, sandwiches, and milk to some 2 000 needy children on a daily basis.”

Although Project One kicked off in the Western Cape, it soon grew to include growers from the Eastern Cape, KZN, Gauteng, Free State, and North-West. Although the different channels of distribution (producers could for example choose to directly support their closest communities or existing food schemes or local churches, orphanages, and old age homes) made it difficult to keep track of the number of growers who participated or the volume of milk donated, it is safe to say that the scope of goodwill exceeded all expectations.

What is abundantly clear, is that this was another stellar instance of the motto of ‘For You’.







# PLANTING HOPE





# FEEDING THE FUTURE

## WITH SO MUCH MORE THAN FOOD

Sometimes hope arrives via the simplest gestures, like planting the very first seeds in a vegetable garden. COVID-19 not only brought fear and negativity to the homes of South African citizens, but the various lockdowns also created somewhat of a hiatus, an opportunity for change and in some, it ignited novel ideas. While the situation paralysed some people, it activated others who found and brought hope by seeking to bring change.

Brothers Geronimo and Valentino de Klerk, residents of the Elsies River community on the outskirts of Cape Town, sprang into action, armed with a few spades and some seeds, and turned a dumping site in the backyard of the Trinity Place Court flats into a thriving food garden. They call it Feed the Future, acknowledging that this was not simply a project to keep them occupied during lockdown, but something that they were determined to take into the future, while also alluding to the way in which



“A garden is a special metaphor for change and growth – from something as little as a seed, comes all things new. Out of nothing, like that empty neglected plot, came a lot of good.” – Valentino de Klerk

they believed they would impact the future of the youth and broader communities.

Their initial aim was to provide food for the unemployed who were severely impacted by the pandemic, but soon they were supporting feeding projects in and around their community and aiming for bigger things. Valentino, known for his roles in the film Skollie and TV series Blood and Water, recalls: “COVID-19 opened our eyes even more to the suffering around us. This was our daily reality, but we realised it did not have to be this way for ever! We told each other we wanted a different future for our children, we believed we could inspire others. A garden is a special metaphor for change and growth – from something as little as a seed, comes all things

new. Out of nothing, like that empty neglected plot, came a lot of good.”

Geronimo is what my grandma would call a ‘strapping young man’ – sure of himself and his purpose, passionate about their work and the potential it has for changing lives. When asked what had prepared him to perform this role, he answers: “We knew poverty, hunger, unemployment and gangsterism and saw people sitting on street corners, doing nothing, and having nowhere to go. And COVID-19 made it worse. We knew what it was like to live with no expectations or way of realising our potential. Now when I see open unused spaces, I see opportunities. These food gardens bring people together; they bring real hope.”



“When I see open unused spaces, I see opportunities. These food gardens bring people together; they bring hope.” – Geronimo de Klerk





## HOPE SPRINGS IN A GARDEN

Establishing this garden, and then erecting a wall around it, had more significance than simply protecting the crop. This vacant land was earlier used as an escape route for criminal elements on the run – now this same path became part of a new future. A collaboration with Reconstructed Living Labs, a Cape Town based NGO, activated youths to volunteer in the garden, receiving incentives in the form of rewards which they could use to buy airtime, groceries, bus tickets and electricity. “We still rely on volunteers to work in the gardens,” says Geronimo. “Fifteen people per garden is ideal for the amount of work.”

In acknowledgement of their drive and success, the Agricultural Producer Support and Development programme of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture brought Minister Ivan Meyer for a visit. “Such great initiative deserves more than recognition, it deserves a helping hand,” said Meyer during the visit.

“This is a fine example of active citizenship, and we applaud these brothers. Their actions are directly aligned with our government’s priorities and therefore we are more than eager to assist them.” The Department contributed gardening equipment, seeds, fertiliser, compost and a 10 000-litre water tank for water harvesting from the roof of the nearby building.

“During the pandemic we operated a daily feeding scheme and even my mother was cooking food using our fresh produce,” says Geronimo. “Yes, the project sustained us and others around us during that period, but we knew we were in this for the long haul. We even planted fruit trees as a symbol of the longevity of our project.” Geronimo shares that at one stage, they mapped out the food intake of a typical family and found that only about 5-7% of their daily meal was nutritious. To this day, they support thirteen feeding schemes with nutritious food.







## ONWARDS: SHARING THEIR PASSION WITH OTHERS

Following the success of the Flats Garden, the brothers extended their project to Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Macassar and at the Edward Primary School where a parking lot was turned into a flourishing garden. Here we meet Sydney Vass, a 22-year-old who attended this very school. This garden also acts as a classroom where the kids can learn to tend a garden. “For me, this is 100% where I need to be to give back to the community in which I grew up,” he says. He proudly shows me their seven-layer garden, from fruit trees, vegetables, and plants of various heights, right down to low-growing herbs. All the produce from the garden goes to the soup kitchen of the school from where every child receives a daily meal. Following a visit by Minister Meyer, this project

also received a much-valued container for storage, a fence, borehole, and irrigation system.

Although walls and fences surround their gardens, there are no boundaries to their project. Ever onwards, bringing hope, food and purpose as they go. “We are looking at the possibility of selling some of our harvest and creating an online store where one could order a vegetable box,” Geronimo adds. “We’ve also listed with Airbnb as a garden tour experience to generate some income.”

“Saying ‘the youth is the future’ is a very powerful saying, but to make this a really bright future, we must act,” he says. “We must give all our energy to make sure that we bring about real change. Sometimes I feel like Noah when he was building the ark – some people mock you, some appear disinterested or don’t believe you’ll succeed and sometimes you lose motivation, but ultimately, we know in our hearts that this is something worth fighting for – for our sakes, and that of the youth of Elsies River.”







## SHORT TERM RELIEF TRADED FOR LONG TERM SECURITY

In a time when ambiguity reigned as the new normal, and when certainties, like food on the table, came under attack, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) brought more than just fleeting relief, but gave some sense of security – food security. The One Home, One Garden campaign is an exemplary example of the parable of the value of teaching a man to fish instead of simply providing him with fish to eat. During 2020, when families were confronted with severe food security issues,

the Department assisted in the establishment of more than 1 370 food gardens. Of these, 433 were established in the Cape Metro, while households in Riversdale, Groot Brak, Thembalethu (George), Nduli and Bella Vista (Ceres), and Dunoon (Cape Metro) also benefited from this initiative.

“By encouraging communities and households to start food gardens, we are shifting the focus from food relief to food security,” said Dr Ivan Meyer,



“By encouraging communities and households to start food gardens, we are shifting the focus from food relief to food security,” said Dr. Ivan Meyer, Western Cape Minister of Agriculture.

Western Cape Minister of Agriculture. “A garden the size of 20m<sup>2</sup> can provide salads, cabbage, onion, beetroot and beans during autumn, and broccoli, spinach, carrots, turnip, and peas during spring. Similarly, a chicken house consisting of four to six chickens provide a family with six to eight eggs per day and much needed protein.”

To Miriam Pakamile (now aged 59) and a handful of others from the Thembalethu community outside George in the Southern Cape, operating a food garden was not a novel concept when COVID-19 hit our shores. She and a group of thirty people started their food project called Laphumilanga in 2016, first growing vegetables in their own back gardens. Following a recommendation from the Eden Municipality, they joined forces and approached a local school for a piece of land that they could jointly farm. “But you know, many members of our earlier group wanted the harvest without the hard work,” says Miriam Pakamile. “They wanted the potential income but without doing the sometimes backbreaking work to prepare the soil and water the crops by hand. We were left with twelve people willing to put in the effort required to sustain a food garden.”

The school finally granted them access to a 200m<sup>2</sup> pocket of land.

“This might not seem large, but this group is able to produce a variety of vegetables right through the year according to the season,” explains Asanda Zulu, the extension officer of the WCDoA walking this journey with Laphumilanga. The WCDoA provided them with seeds, a water tank, and a fence to protect their crop against roaming goats that raided their crops, as well as people who helped themselves to the vegetables at night. A donation of another three five thousand litre water tanks that

are filled from water harvested from the school’s roof, enabled them to progress from hand watering and being dependent on the rain, to installing their very own irrigation system.

### HEALTH COMES IN A WHEELBARROW

And then COVID-19 snuck into our country and into the Thembalethu community. “At that stage, our







numbers were down to five resolute people, three of whom were classified as ‘elderly’ and COVID-19 regulations determined that they now needed to stay at home,” says Miriam. “Bonga Ndabambi who is blind, and I had to work very hard to keep the garden going – not only for our own sakes, but especially for those who were now faced with hunger.”

They divided their produce into three sections: 60% they generously donated to those in need, 30% they sold (at surprisingly low prices) and 10% they divided amongst those working the land. “We supported thirty-five families and three crèches with daily food parcels containing cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, onions and more,” she elaborates, “and we had no transport, we took the food to the people in wheelbarrows.”

In August 2020 Miriam also contracted the virus, “but I survived, became strong and came back to the job as soon as I was able. This project gave us all a purpose during a time when panic left people helpless.”

In March 2021, their arduous work paid off as their contribution was noticed by the Department of Social Development. They were allocated a tender to supply produce to twenty soup kitchens in different areas around their immediate community. “It was a great feeling to be able to be in a position to help so many others,” Miriam recalls. “God gave us the strength to continue, and we supported these soup kitchens every week for ten months from March to December.” When they experienced a shortage of some crops, they purchased it from other food gardens, generously extending the favour. Laphumilanga is paying it forward also by sharing their expertise with other people from as far as the Eastern Cape.

“The level of their commitment amazes me,” shares Asanda. “The fact that I am still seeing the same faces since I set out to help them in 2017, is really something to take note of – few persevere for so long. I love seeing how people are being elevated through agriculture, how lives are changed, and people are empowered to grow their own nutritious food and even sell some to generate an income.” To this day, five dedicated people run this garden,

three elderly ladies and two young men. The Department not only gifted them with equipment, but also shared technical know-how about crop production (including soil preparation, spacing, pest management and more), and presented courses in conflict management (this is important when working together as a group), communication skills, marketing, and basic computer literacy. “Going forward, one of the Department’s economists will help them to draft their own production records as it is important to be able to determine whether you are growing or stagnating. One does not grow without measuring.”

Laphumilanga is a registered Non-profit Organisation, and this accreditation, together with a record of accomplishment in terms of commitment and good management, makes them a safe project to invest in. They have requested access to another piece of land in the school yard to expand their operation. The arrangement with the school is that it, in turn, receives vegetable donations for the school feeding scheme.

“We don’t know what we would have done without the help of the Department,” says Miriam. “Asanda always encouraged us, even when half of our fence was stolen earlier this year. She keeps it light and we laugh a lot – it keeps us positive. God-willing, we’ll be here for a long time still.”

**At the beginning of 2022, Miriam and her small team won first prize in the Western Cape Department of Agriculture District Based Food Garden Competition as the best community garden along the Garden Route. Their R6 000 prize money enabled them to purchase much-needed equipment from the local co-op. Amongst these, a gazebo for their stand selling their fresh produce.**





## WHEN THE YOUTH INSPIRES THE OLD

The people of Middelpoos, a farm situated between Malmesbury and Riebeek Kasteel in the Swartland, have been growing vegetables since 2018 when they started a 0.5-hectare community food garden with the support of donors. Aunty Judith's Garden was named after a generous Welsh lady who, following the visit of her niece to the farm, donated money to start a feeding scheme for rural farm children. However, although very grateful, Middelpoos and its people, and more specifically, its children and

youth, were determined to not remain dependent on handouts.

At the height of the garden's success the garden had grown to six hectares and forty-four farm women worked in the garden, selling their produce to locals, the Epping Market, and the local Spar. "In addition to fulfilling the need for nutritious food, twenty-four children also helped and saved the income from selling surplus vegetables to participate at

the SA Judo Championships," says Ingrid Lestrade, Director at Vikispan (Pty) Ltd on Middelpoos farm and founder of the Inspire Children and Youth Non-Profit Organisation. "They all pulled together and raised a significant amount. It made me so proud to see children and teenagers working in the garden, when one often hears of ungrateful or unmotivated young people."

Ingrid Lestrade, the motivating force behind the Middelpoos success story is also an attorney, conveyancer and notary public of the High Court of South Africa; a bronze medallist in the 2016 Commonwealth Judo Games and four times South African Judo champion. She teaches rural farm children Judo to help them feel safe, motivated to stay in school, to improve their school marks and inspire their parents to drink more responsibly.

During March 2017, she assumed her current role as Director at Vikispan (Pty) Ltd and established the Inspire Children and Youth Non-Profit Organisation on Middelpoos farm. The government bought Middelpoos in 2012 to help thirteen farm families use the resources on this farm to break a generational cycle of poverty.

And then COVID-19 entered their farmgate. For this small farm community, the reality included that the children missed six months of school, some agri-workers did not have food on the table and there were transport challenges which brought the workers available to work on the farm, down to six. Often much-needed food parcels from various institutions did not reach this far into the rural areas.



"We quickly had to decide, will we continue to try to sell our vegetables, or will we join those able to help the less fortunate," Ingrid says. "It was a unanimous decision: we would give what we have and soon we were supporting twenty-five families on a weekly basis. This number grew to no less than nine hundred families in need."





## FROM RECEIVING TO GIVING

Ingrid passionately shares that for her, the greatest success of this story is that a group of people, previously seemingly powerless and 100% dependent on others, took control and turned from receivers into givers. “Before, the dialogue of this group was: ‘I cannot do anything, I have nothing to offer the world’. Suddenly, when this crisis hit, they made a plan and became part of the ‘fortunate’ group that had a purpose and were able to support others during these dark times.” It was physically laborious as they farm organically, which means that weed control is labour intensive and back-breaking work. Parents and children worked shoulder-to-shoulder and reaped the benefits both in immediate ways of having food on the table, but also in terms of improved relationships. “You know how, when faced with a crisis, people can become selfish: ‘how can I give when I have so little and what if things get worse?’ We saw the opposite! Our people experienced the joy of being part of the solution, of giving. Suddenly the men were also helping in the garden and there was less violence in the homes, even though everyone were forced to stay at home.”

“The Western Cape Department of Agriculture was a great help,” says Ingrid. “They provided us with the seedlings for the six hectares and with vital infrastructure and knowledge.” Also, during the pandemic, the farm’s olive crop was ready to be harvested and, in an effort to help them develop a new range of commercial products, the Department invited them to Elsenburg to learn the art of olive oil making and curing of table olives.

The National Lottery, Distell Development Trust, Kinderfonds MAMAS, a Dutch funding agency and different individual donors contributed to their food parcel distribution to the nine hundred families, while donations earmarked for the purchasing of masks, turned into another capacity building opportunity. “Instead of buying masks, we bought material and taught the women to sew,” Ingrid elaborates. “Many of the women work on the surrounding wine farms during the harvesting season, but now they had something to keep them busy during the off-season.” They sewed 6 327 masks which were distributed to more than three thousand people living on thirty-two farms in the area.

“It is more than possible to find the bright side of COVID-19,” says Ingrid. “On Middelpoos there is a new spirit of empowerment, of being part of the solution. I feared that the absence from school might negatively impact the children, but instead, the focused attention at home has improved most of their marks significantly.” She admits that she personally found it hard to not only feel responsible for her own health and the well-being of her family, but also for a whole community. “At times I also had to search deep for motivation to keep going, but the reward of seeing such personal growth and a new can-do attitude, makes me look back at COVID-19 with a grateful heart.”

With the pandemic in the rear-view mirror, Middelpoos farm is again finding its feet. “We used our skills to grow vegetables to keep the community healthy and are now in the process of looking for seedlings to rebuild the garden and funding to keep the lights on. But the zeal has remained and lives have been changed.”

“

“At times I also had to search deep for motivation to keep going, but the reward of seeing such personal growth and a new can-do attitude, makes me look back at COVID-19 with a grateful heart.” – Ingrid Lestrade



# INNOVATION DURING ADVERSITY





## GOING ONLINE: 'N BOER MAAK 'N PLAN\*

Flattening the curve, social distancing, Zoom and Zoom fatigue, virtual wine tastings, acronyms like PPE (personal protective equipment) and WFH (work from home) ... the new normal. Not only did we have to get used to the various medical terms introducing us to the coronavirus, but the pandemic also created its own new vocabulary or took ownership of words that previously had different innuendos.

And, while one sorely missed the personal and physical interaction with loved ones and colleagues

during times of lockdown (another new concept) and social distancing, technology stepped up to bridge the gap. Platforms like Zoom and then MS Teams created connection possibilities that forever changed the way we interact across geographical divides. Webinars, e-learning and virtual meetings abounded and now, when COVID-19 has become part of daily life almost like the normal flu, these ways of communication have proven their worth beyond a doubt. Business people as well as families that find themselves at opposite ends of the world, now

\* A farmer makes a plan



No predictions or any amount of planning or strategizing or formulation of worst-case scenarios could have prepared us for this. – Dr. Dirk Troskie

schedule and 'hop onto' an online meeting without wasting time or budget on travelling.

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDa) embraced this technology for a variety of purposes. In a time when the staff members of the Department needed to hear directly from management about the way forward and how to navigate through the different restriction and lockdown levels, two virtual meetings – combining in-person and online formats – served to affirm, build confidence, and provide hope and perspective. "Already during the first month of the pandemic, we lost two colleagues to this disease," says Dr Dirk Troskie, Director: Business Planning and Strategy of the WCDa. "There was a lot of emotional trauma, and it was vital that we check in with each other and give people an opportunity to share their experiences." The Department has offices and farms in six regions in the Western Cape.

Another highly successful and beneficial online opportunity came in the form of specially arranged webinars with California about water-use efficiencies and six months later, another on climate change. Says Dr Troskie, "California and the Western Cape share a similar climate and already in 2019, a delegation visited us with the vision of signing a collaboration agreement. These webinars were open to all interested parties and offered valuable insights – for free." In the meantime, the agreement has been signed and since then these two institutions have jointly presented another webinar on vineyard production in dry areas and are working together on a project on the polyphagous shot hole borer which are wreaking havoc in the trees in parts of the Cape Metro and Cape Winelands District.

## TUITION IN THE TIME OF CORONA

"The Elsenburg Agricultural College had to create a technology-based game plan for tuition in what felt like the blink of an eye," remembers Hayley Rodkin, head of this training institution outside Stellenbosch. "Like other secondary and tertiary facilities, our lecturers had to swiftly develop material suited to online and hybrid tuition, but also had to make allowances for students and their connectivity realities when working and studying remotely." A very first virtual graduation for the class of 2022 showed lecturers practicing social distancing and wearing masks but nonetheless succeeded in offering students some form of decorum and celebration befitting a graduation ceremony. "The class of 2020 will be remembered as a special group of students who faced a monumental challenge," said Dr Mogale Sebopetsa, the WCDa Head of Department during this ceremony. "They had to adapt quickly to the new normal. Your graduation is testament to your own agility."

## CONTINUED CONNECTION DESPITE SOCIAL DISTANCING

Fortunately, food production and veterinary services were deemed as essential services, which meant that extension officers and veterinarians could continue to visit farmers. However, the Department went above and beyond to reach out to their different clients. Where large group gatherings continued





to be prohibited for the larger part of two years, it arranged well-attended digital farmer information days.

The 2020 Outeniqua Information Day provided over seven hundred viewers countrywide with insights on different issues around pasture-based milk production. Five expert speakers from this research farm outside George shared information about subjects like cultivar evaluations, production potential of different pastures and more. “Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, our team of researchers are determined to not allow the pandemic to stand in the way of producers gaining access to this information,” said Minister Ivan Meyer at the opening of the event. “Sharing research findings forms part of our strategic priorities and the WCDoA executes this mandate from seven research sites across the province. This year it will be no different.” In 2021 the event was repeated in its virtual format with similar success and close to 1 000 attendees.

In 2020, a Women in Agriculture webinar (WOW Day) brought together three hundred women around the topics of transformation and market access, innovation and technological advancements. During this session, the Department shared various ‘wow’ or inspirational developments that producers could benefit from. Specially developed QR codes shared during the session lead viewers to different presentations which addressed certain issues in more detail. “The pandemic also forced us to reconsider the efficacy of our different communication channels,” says Mary James, Head of Communication. One of the favourable outcomes has been that information and research findings are now available in a variety of formats accessible to clients even on their mobile devices and which are, by nature of the intranet, not time bound. Producers can now use the information shared in this way as a reference library should it be necessary to go and check the information, or as a refresher of what was presented.

All role-players along the agricultural value chain understand and have faced and dealt with the precarious nature of this sector, and crises and

disasters are part and parcel of a life in agriculture. Think of droughts, floods, hailstorms, damaging winds and labour strikes that can so easily cripple a harvest. However, COVID-19 could well be one of the worst disruptors the sector has ever faced. “No predictions or any amount of planning or strategising or formulation of worst-case scenarios could have prepared us for this,” says Dr Troskie.

An external audit commissioned by the Department to map and evaluate their response to the pandemic, determined that the Department fared well despite the myriad of uncertainties and often-changing regulations and restrictions it had to navigate on behalf of their staff and the industry. Says Dr Troskie, “As a governmental service provider, we felt the pressure of continuing to serve our clients to the best of our abilities throughout these trying circumstances. We realised that, during times of crises, it is sometimes more important to make a decision and take action – even if you must adjust your direction slightly as new information surfaces – rather than to be paralysed and wait for external guidance that is slow in coming.”







## WATER EQUALS OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EBENHAESER FARMERS

The Ebenhaeser community lives and farms some 40km from Vredendal along the West Coast of South Africa. In 1926, as part of the so-called Lutzville Land Swap transaction, the land belonging to this community was expropriated without proper reimbursement. As part of this land swap, 153 two-hectare plots with irrigation and grazing rights were allocated to some members.

In recent years, almost a century later, the owners of these plots were struggling to farm sustainably.

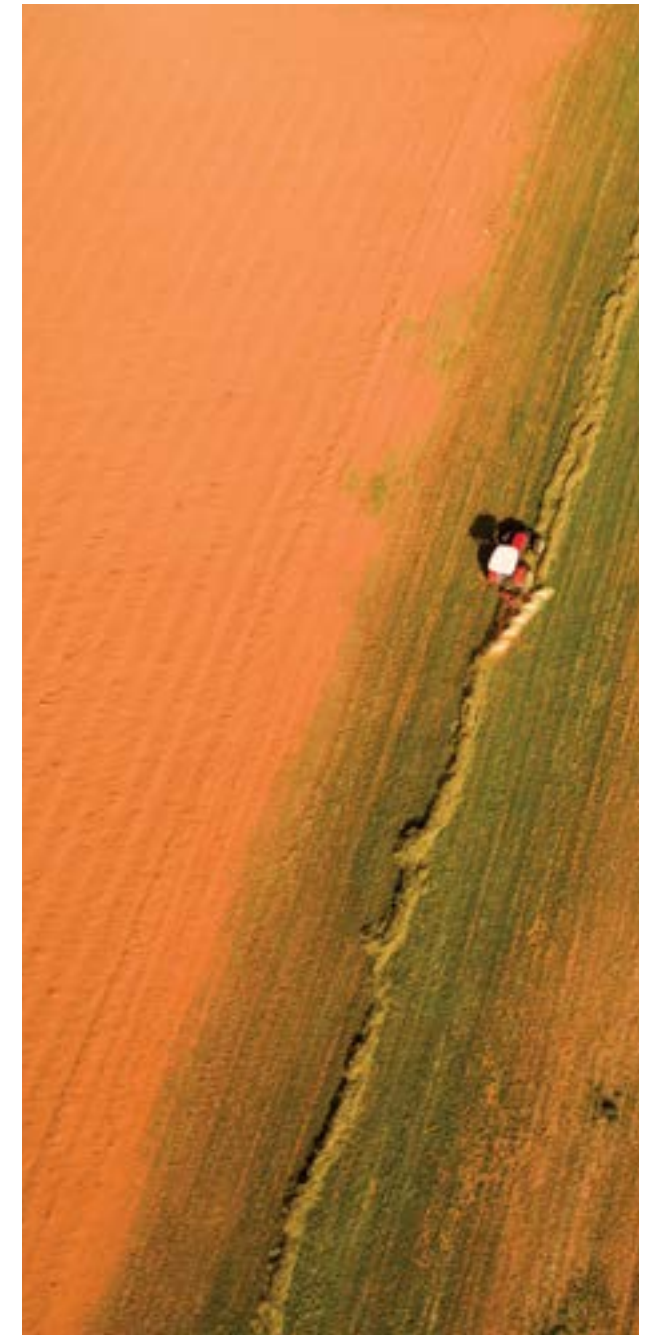
The initial earth water furrows were long since dilapidated, wasting much water along the way, and there was no proper water management system in place. While the Lower Olifants Water User Association (LORWUA), who manages the canal system below the Clanwilliam dam, delivers the water to Ebenhaeser at their border, Ebenhaeser is still responsible to distribute the water from the LORWUA canal to each of the 153 plots. Irrigation farming was thus a tall order for these farmers, especially in the harsh summer months, as the

deficient system was unable to deliver the water in the volumes that the farmers needed, when they needed it.

In answer to the farmers' limiting circumstances, the National Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) took responsibility for upgrading the bulk water distribution system and on 12 June 2021 DALRRD Minister Thoko Didiza officially commissioned this new water scheme. The bulk water system now brings water from the LORWUA canal to the Ebenhaeser dam and onwards to thirty cluster points which each service four plots via a pipeline. The Western Cape Department of Agriculture, according to its mandate, has been tasked to handle the on-farm development of allocated agricultural land for irrigation purposes.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Parliament made funds available for agricultural projects which would encourage the development of small scale agri businesses with food security in mind, but which could also possibly create extended economic opportunities for farmers. The allotted R9,8 million would enable the Department to support 80 plots and following a survey to determine interest, 76 farmers were identified to participate in and benefit from the project.

"A lucrative option was to establish lucerne under sprinkler irrigation," explains Marius du Randt, District Manager: North West Coast, Agricultural Producer Support and Development of the WCDoA. "Lucerne is one of the crops that was traditionally grown in this area. People are familiar with it; it is not too expensive to establish, and a market already existed with livestock farmers in the wider area depending on lucerne as feed. It is also a crop that does not need high technical knowledge to manage." Planting lucerne would for many be the first step of their development as a pasture farmer, preparing them to later plant crops that would need more expertise but would also earn them a higher income. Lucerne is a perennial crop from which one could expect the first crop after three months and which could potentially last for five to six years.







Although no one could ever have imagined something like the Coronavirus, I would urge farmers to have a nest egg, or at least an alternative activity which could generate an income when your main income stream is cut off. – Sydney Hahn

A local firm was appointed by CASIDRA (Cape Agency for Sustainable Integrated Development in Rural Areas) to connect each plot to the bulk water distribution system, to install a sprinkler irrigation system on each plot, handle soil preparations, and sow the lucerne. Only then the project was signed off for the farmers to take further. “I’ve experienced real gratitude from these farmers,” says Du Randt. “The project has had a positive effect throughout the community.”

Sydney Hahn, chairman of the local farmers’ union and a farmer himself, agrees, “The lucerne project came at the right time and successfully addressed very real needs. It generated an additional income for many households during those difficult times, but it also enabled stock farmers to grow their herds, a long-term benefit. It also created extra jobs.” According to Hahn, managing labour was a challenge during the height of the pandemic: “Our farming operations are labour intensive, and it took careful planning to ensure that workers could reach our farms despite transport and social distancing restrictions.”

“Personally, as a family man and a farmer, this crisis showed me that it is critical to have some financial reserves for unforeseen circumstances. Although no one could ever have imagined something like the coronavirus, I would urge farmers to build a nest egg, or at least an alternative activity which could generate an income when your main income stream is cut off.”

“The Ebenhaeser irrigation scheme is the result of successful partnerships and collaboration. Every farmer requires land and water security, and we have delivered that,” said Minister Ivan Meyer. “The

irrigation scheme brings about improved water security, greater sustainability, increased production and enhances market access opportunities. Ultimately it will lead to economic growth and more jobs being created in the region.”







## FORESIGHTING TOWARDS A PREFERRED FUTURE

The pandemic brought the world and its people to a momentary pause. It gave individuals, businesses and governments cause to reflect, evaluate the status quo, and decide how they will go forward. For the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, it was no different. Pause, reflect, learn, and plan. Furthermore, COVID-19 has created a 'before and after' – a definite divide between the way things were before the pandemic and thereafter. And while the pandemic is slowly but surely receding, we see how certain things have fundamentally changed or have sped up in their process of transformation.

"Nothing could have prepared us for this extremely disruptive situation, the uncertainty and dire implications for our sector," reminisces Dr Dirk Troskie, Director: Business Planning and Strategy of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture. "As a department, we have dealt with extensive natural crises over the years, and we have developed an aptitude for taking decisive action, for advocating for our sector and the people dependent on it, and for learning and growing because of these. But the pandemic was unprecedented in its magnitude."

In an effort to use this experience to explore and better prepare for the future, the Department, together with a diverse set of stakeholders, formed a think tank to consider the future and craft a Post COVID strategy for the Western Cape agricultural sector – looking ahead as far as 2050. "I believe that the communication of a report starts during the inception phase. For this reason, the composition of the group included, in addition to officials of the WCDoA, representatives from the sector as well as other provincial and national departments," he explains. "Even before the pandemic, we knew that climate change was a reality, that we needed to embrace and prepare for the 4th Industrial

Revolution, that markets would shift as countries became richer or poorer and as populations grow older. But the unexpectedness and magnitude of COVID-19 opened our eyes to the possibility of much larger world events and while we are thoroughly aware that we cannot predict the future, it helps to consider what we know and plan the best we can." The goal would be to support a resilient, sustainable, and equitable agriculture and agri-processing sector in the Western Cape, while the focus would be on safeguarding health, safety, and employment security, both for the Department and the sector, and to protect food security in the province.





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We were adamant that a report would mean little if it were not used to create an action plan, and then preferably a plan with a list of recommendations that you can count on your one hand. – Dr. Dirk Troskie

## AGRICULTURE IN 2050

Much of the strength of the three-month long foresighting and strategising process lay in the participation of the different industry bodies representing multiple perspectives. Their collective goal: to help create a ‘future-fit’ sector.

This project, initiated by the WCDoA, set out to answer four research questions:

- identify innovations, trends and trend breaks
- identify potential predictable surprises
- generate a range of possible futures for the sector (including ‘re-imaging’ the sector 30 years from now) and
- identify potential interventions for all role-players.

The COVID-19 Future of the Western Cape Agriculture and Agri-processing Sector Project Report was published in November 2020. “We were adamant that a report would mean little if it were not used to create an action plan,” says Dr Troskie, “and then preferably a plan with a list of recommendations that you can count on your one hand. The report was for the whole sector and the horticultural industry subsequently used it as a basis to develop their own plan. The WCDoA used the report to develop a Management Improvement Plan (MIP) for our own response in assisting the sector towards the desired future.”

### What is foresighting?

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)\*, foresighting uses a range of methodologies, such as scanning the horizon for emerging changes, analysing megatrends and developing multiple scenarios, to reveal and discuss useful ideas about the future. It does not attempt to offer definitive answers about what the future will hold, but to expand and reframe the range of plausible developments that need to be taken into consideration. Strategic foresight aims to pose key questions that might have gone unasked in developing a strategy and to reveal and challenge potentially fatal assumptions and expectations built into current policies and plans – ultimately enabling the creation of a new improved strategy or plan.

<https://www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight>







The four main thrusts of the Management Improvement Plan are, in short:

- **AFRICA:** Scan and monitor the continent as one of the fastest growing markets for agricultural produce from the Western Cape. “And although the Western Cape cannot drive the country’s export strategy into Africa, we have the advantage that Parliament, as well as numerous consulates from African countries resides in Cape Town. Using this to our advantage, the Department recently presented a comprehensive services exhibition at Elsenburg to which they invited consulate staff, encouraging them to share with their respective countries.”
- **4th IR TECHNOLOGY:** Collectively launch a 4th IR Tech programme specifically designed to improve production and market access of smaller players and democratise agricultural 4th IR technology.
- **GOOD GOVERNANCE TOWARDS POLICY CERTAINTY:** Motivate the benefits of good governance at national level and create an enabling environment for Western Cape agriculture.
- **CLIMATE CHANGE:** Encourage, incentivise, regulate and support all farmers and producers to switch to sustainable, ‘climate smart’ production. Provide ‘climate smart’

infrastructure, including renewable energy, technology, transport modes and more.

For each of these main considerations, an action plan has been developed which will be audited after a period of two years to ascertain the positive movement and success of initiatives. One such example is the Evaluation of the Future of Farming in the Arid Areas of the Western Cape, as a subsection to the Climate Change consideration. According to the report dryland agriculture, like in the arid areas of the province, is particularly vulnerable to pressures like ‘climate change, emerging technologies, socio-economic shifts, changed market dynamics, desertification and the degradation of the natural resource base’. The arid areas of the Western Cape – and the farms, value-chains, and communities within them – are particularly vulnerable to these stressors. This evaluation set out to define an aspirational future for these areas, and the interventions necessary to reach such a desired and sustainable state.

“These evaluations, reports and strategies are not simply words on paper and producers and others participating in the agricultural and agri-processing value chain will do well to familiarise themselves with the contents and become part of a better future for all,” says Dr Troskie.

**Important:** all the mentioned reports, as well as the MIPs are available on [www.elsenburg.com](http://www.elsenburg.com)







## GOOD NEWS NUGGETS

### FACING MORE THAN ONE GIANT

The agricultural sector is not unfamiliar to the occurrence of natural disasters or other crises. However, when they occur simultaneously, its resourcefulness and ability to endure are sorely tested. When COVID-19 hit, parts of the Western Cape has been in the grips of a severe and persistent drought, the worst in 100 years. Producers in the Central and Little Karoo, parts of the Cape Winelands

and the northern parts of Matzikamma, found some relief during this time when the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) was able to distribute R10 million in fodder support to 1 727 farmers located in these extreme or critically extreme drought areas. Working together seamlessly, the various co-ops, farmers, and officials of the WCDoA and Casidra ensured that the fodder

vouchers reached affected farmers soon after the announcement of the available relief measures.

### BUSINESS, BUT NOT AS USUAL

When no one knew what 'business as usual' implied and when especially small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) bore the brunt of debilitating COVID-19 restrictions, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) continued to support and nurture these businesses within the province's agricultural sphere. Training material focusing on financing and record-keeping, business analysis and planning, and market development, were made

readily available online, while in-person training on a variety of agri-processing (cheese, jam, yoghurt, juice and fruit drying) subjects took place with full compliance to social distancing and personal hygiene regulations.

### WHEN ALCOHOL SAVES LIVES

Within days of the breakout of the coronavirus and the consequent need for alcohol-based sanitisers, Distell (producer and marketer of spirits, wines, and ciders) announced that it would produce hand sanitisers and other hygienic products from 100 000 litres of alcohol to help curb the spread of







the coronavirus. The sanitisers were distributed free to vulnerable communities in close collaboration with government departments, amongst others, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture.

Distell Group CEO, Richard Rushton, said in their media release, “We are determined to support our government in its bid to halt the current rapid spread of COVID-19 and in the absence of a vaccine, good hygiene remains one of the most effective options to do so.”

Said Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Ivan Meyer, at the time: “It is an example of what is possible when a key role-player within the agriculture value chain displays good corporate citizenship by responding positively to the call for solidarity in our fight against the COVID-19 virus.”

## QUARANTINE OF A DIFFERENT KIND

In March 2020 ‘quarantine, disease and virus’ became part of the world’s COVID-vocabulary. For the deciduous fruit sector, it carried a more positive nuance when the Western Cape Department of Agriculture announced in April 2020 the allocation of R10 million towards the establishment of a new quarantine accredited tissue culture facility. The facility will provide quarantine compliant plant material to local industry and so further enhance the Western Cape’s status as a key player and its ability to compete globally. The new plants produced in this facility will be disease and virus-free, optimising production of cultivars which satisfies quarantine concerns of the international trade.





## CHARLENE NIEUWOUDT

# AUTHOR'S NOTES



"Everyone has something to give, even if it's just time to listen and encourage."

Also, if it were to simply rehash and document the dire circumstances people faced, it would do no good. Rather, these stories serve to remind us of the very fabric of our nature that came to light in a time of darkness. You'll read about great compassion and open hearts, about creative initiatives to address seemingly hopeless realities, and about resilience in a sector that is well acquainted with challenges and once again endured and has risen above.

The interviews brought home for me again the fact that there are so many ways to make a difference and that, I would dare say, everyone has something to give, even if it's just time to listen and encourage. The heroes in these stories are dreamers, carers, planners and action takers of all ages. We acknowledge you all.

One also has to give credit to the Western Cape Department of Agriculture for commissioning this book. Their commitment to celebrating the good news stories in the agricultural sector speaks of nation building by honouring people and organisations for their worthy efforts.

Upon reading these stories, one easily believes that the Department and its people are indeed motivated and driven by Minister Ivan Meyer's hashtag #fortheloveofagriculture.

To a sector that jointly overcame – Salut!

One of the narratives that was shared from phone to phone and in social discussions about the impact of Covid was the humbling notion that, yes, everyone was in the midst of the storm, and yet, some were riding out the storm on a cruise ship, buffered against some of the harshest winds, while others were clinging on to flotsam for dear life. The point: COVID-19 impacted everyone, but for some, the experience was more harrowing than for others.

However, the stories in this book were not chosen to call attention to the different levels of COVID-19-induced discomfort.

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