

**19 Oktober/October 2018**

**Farmers and Agriculturists acknowledged for outstanding achievements in agriculture**

***Boere en landboukundiges ontvang erkenning vir uitstaande prestasies in landbou***

**News release by the Agricultural Writers SA North on the regional awards for the Farmer, New Entrant into Commercial Agriculture and Agriculturist of the Year, 2018**

The Agricultural Writers SA North acknowledged the outstanding achievements of three commercial farmers, a new entrant into commercial agriculture, and three agriculturists. Awards were handed over to them on Friday evening in Pretoria at a function sponsored by Bayer SA.

One of the aims of these awards is to give prominence to the role that farmers and agriculturists play in the agricultural sector in South Africa. It is also important to note that these award recipients also impact on the broader economy of the country and the southern African region.

Speaking on behalf of the sponsor, Bayer, Pieter Smit, Marketing and Product Management Lead for Africa, said that the combined vision of the new Bayer was focused on shaping the future of agriculture for farmers, but also to help create a better future for all people and the planet. "Sustainability remains embedded in our values, and likewise we remain committed to advancing modern agriculture that can assist farmers to be more sustainable by providing innovative tools to grow food, fuel and fibre using fewer natural resources," he added.

According to Smit, South Africa could be an example to the world on how to feed its people in a healthy, sustainable way.

The candidates will all participate in the national awards ceremony of the Agricultural Writers SA in Paarl on 16 November when the National Farmer, New Entrant into Commercial Agriculture and Agriculturist of the year will be announced.

## Candidates

### Agriculturist of the Year

- Gauteng – Wandile Sihlobo
- Limpopo – Frits van Oudtshoorn
- Mpumalanga – Johann du Preez

### New Entrant into Commercial Agriculture

- Gauteng - Mbali Nkabinde

### Farmer of the Year

- Limpopo – Mahela Boerdery (Edward Vorster & seuns)
- KwaZulu-Natal – Joseph Baynes Estate (Pty) Ltd (Myles van Deventer)
- North West – Johan Styger

“Every day we are met with the challenge of feeding a growing world population. With these awards, Agricultural Writers SA North acknowledges the role that farmers and agriculturists play in the agricultural sector and in addressing food security. I am sure, that although we will not hear the words, future generations will thank you for your contributions and efforts to create an enabling environment that facilitated growth and success and food security in our lovely country,” said Magda du Toit, chairman of Agricultural Writers SA North.

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## More about the 2018 Agricultural Writers SA North’s award recipients

**Mbali Nkabinde** obtained her B.Com degree in psychology from the University of Johannesburg but changed her career from recruitment to agriculture. In 2016, she started her farming business, with her husband as silent partner. She is now the CEO of Green Terrace, a successful farming enterprise planting

Swiss chard, green peppers and green beans. Mbali has a ten-year lease agreement for the 14 ha farm in Boksburg on which she has installed drip irrigation on 7 ha and erected ten tunnels and 11 shade-net structures. The produce goes to food processors, the fresh produce industry and formal and informal markets. Although things were not always easy, Mbali wants to build Green Terrace as a brand that can inspire other young people to make agriculture their career of choice.

She understands the value of mentors and in 2017, Mbali was nominated for the Sage Small Business Awards. On what the future holds, Mbali says, “Farming taught me life should be enjoyed. I enjoy being outdoors and watching the plants grow. I know that I will one day become the very first black female mega farmer in South Africa!”

Mbali aims to buy her own piece of land and wants to employ more people –she currently employs seven full-time and ten contract workers.

**Wandile Sihlobo**, an agricultural economist, heads Agribusiness Research at the Agricultural Business Chamber (Agbiz). He provides timeous and valuable insights to agribusinesses, primary producers and the media. His daily notes to Agbiz members form the basis on which many decisions are taken in the corporate agricultural sphere. Farmers also value his inputs and insights.

He often leads the agricultural conversation in the media and on digital platforms and for the past couple of years, Wandile has been among the most visible proponents of matters relating to agricultural economics in print and social media. He is highly regarded by the agricultural and financial media and is a columnist for *Business Day*, *Business Times*, *Huffington Post* and *Farmers' Weekly*. In his spare time, he writes daily for his blog – Agricultural Economics Today. Through his online presence he succeeds in raising awareness of the realities that impact producers and consumers on a fundamental level. His influence and opinion can be seen in deliberations with Government, political organisations and institutions such as Bloomberg, the Reserve Bank and the European Union amongst others. He also advises on provincial agricultural strategic plans, the more recent being in the Eastern Cape. He was recently appointed to a panel on President Cyril Ramaphosa's advisory panel to give advice and lend support to the inter-ministerial committee on land reform. He was also recently appointed as a commissioner at ITAC (International Trade Administration Commission).

**Frits van Oudtshoorn** is an agriculturist who specialises in pasture and veld management. He has a great passion for the sustainable utilisation of natural resources. He has vast knowledge on grasses and the natural veld and this passion led to him publishing two books on this topic: *Gids tot Grasse van Suider Afrika* and *Veldbestuur – Begingsels en Praktyke*. The first was published when he was only 26 years of age in 1991, and the latter in 2015.

Frits studied Agricultural extension after school and wanted to farm, but due to circumstances those plans had to be abandoned. He started his career as an extension officer in Lichtenburg, but later completed his Masters Degree in Nature Conservation. After working as a pasture specialist at the ARC Roodeplaat as well as at the Limpopo Department of Agriculture, he became a private consultant with the aim of assisting farmers with veld management issues. In addition, Frits owns a training consultancy, Africa Land-Use Training, accredited at AgriSeta. He continues his research on his farm just outside Modimolle and focuses on pastures and veld rehabilitation. He has collaborated with international institutions such as the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and Barenbrug International.

**Johann du Preez** is a pioneer in the mango industry in South Africa. His innovations have advanced the industry and allowed commercial mango growers in South Africa to achieve greater heights. He has served as chairman of the SA Mango Growers Association (SAMGA) for eight years and vice chairman for six years. He has been a contributing member since 1989. Under Johann's guidance, Bavaria Fruit Estate has become the leader in pruning strategies for

mangoes in the South African context and under his management the first commercial plantings of the cultivar 'Shelly' were done with positive results. Various other commercial growers are following.

Johann made an enormous contribution by introducing the first commercial harvesting of mangoes onto picking trays. This method of harvesting saw a massive quality improvement of South African mango in the world markets. Johann was the recipient of the SAMGA Golden Mango Award in 2018. This award is bestowed upon an individual who has made a substantial contribution to the mango industry. He fulfilled the criteria for the leadership, technical and marketing divisions.

**Johan Styger**, owner of BTB Simmentalers in Hartbeesfontein near Klerksdorp, was announced as Southern African Stud Breeder of the Year for 2016 in an annual competition hosted by Pick 'n Pay, *Landbouweekblad* and Breedplan. Johan, a consulting engineer from Klerksdorp, farms on Schoemansfontein, a 1 019 ha farm of which half is rested for a year and the other half is semi-intensively grazed. He has been a part-time farmer and breeder since 1986, and started the BTB Simmentaler Stud in 2004. The premise of his business is that genetic progress is measured by the profit from genetics. Johan believes that the success of the stud is based on three aspects: pasture management, fertility and performance. His Simmentaler herd is one of only two herds in South Africa which has a four-star rating for completeness of performance.

He believes in acting pro-actively to reduce risk and some of the measures he has in place include very strict bio-security, extensive health management of his herds and to stay abreast of the newest developments in the sector. Johan hosts an annual farmers and youth information day on his farm and visits herds in Germany and Australia to learn from those farmers' experiences.

**Joseph Baynes Estate** operates on a 9 300 ha farm called Baynesfield Estate, 25 km outside Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. Myles van Deventer is the managing director of the company and leads a team of managers for this diversified agricultural business. Myles holds a BSc. Agric, MSc. Agric and an MBA degree and reports to a board of directors. The company has a 2 000-sow unit and a 900-cow beef herd together with a feedlot. The company also has 1 350 ha of arable land that provides maize for a company feed mill that produces 1 200 tonnes of pig and cattle feed per month. In addition, the company has 200 ha of avocado orchards and is a joint shareholder in an avocado packing shed packing nearly 1 million cartons per season.

The company strives to embrace new technologies to improve its biological productivity and has strategically and pro-actively set itself up to minimize risk and they mitigate risk by ensuring the business has scale, is integrated, but also diversified. They also focus on products where they believe they have a competitive advantage. Integration allows the company to better control the value chain, thus all the maize produced on the farm is put through the company's feed mill to provide feed for its large commercial piggery and feedlot.

The company has been acknowledged for its efforts in the conservation of threatened grassland species and has been recognised by the World Wildlife Fund as a Blue Swallow custodian and an Oribi custodian.

**Mahela Boerdery** with various business interests grouped together under the Mahela Group name and was established in 1942 by the late BJ Vorster. It is now in the hands of the third generation. The name “Mahela” was given to BJ Vorster by the local people and means quick, no nonsense, and this was the way this business has grown ever since. Today Mahela owns 8 326 ha of land and lease another 1 364 ha on which citrus and subtropical fruit are produced as well as livestock and game are kept. In total Mahela produces around 70 000 tonnes of citrus fruit as well as 10 000 tonnes of subtropical fruit per annum – mostly for the export market.

Other business interests of the group include a chartered flight service, shares in Granor Passi (juice company), Houers Koöperatief Beperk (carton manufacturer), Destrimix (chemical company), an OK Minimart and liquor store, a fuel station and a franchise take-away restaurant. Mahela Group is also involved in the conservation and breeding of game, some of which are owned and marketed as part of a 50% partnership agreement with Laeveld Sitrus in the name of BJ Vorster. Mahela Group also owns 50% of BJ Blyde, which has mango and citrus interests in Hoedspruit.

Mahela has also started a joint venture with the Rietfontein Homeless People’s Trust to establish soft citrus of 110 ha on their land, which will be part of the 300 ha soft citrus project close to Ohrigstad. About 170 ha, of which 100 ha are under nets, are already planted. The Khomanani Mahela project, of which 50% is owned by some of Mahela’s long term and middle management workers, is also a very exciting new development!