

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

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Farmers and Agriculturists acknowledged for outstanding achievements in agriculture

At a gala event held in Stellenbosch on Friday evening the Agricultural Writers SA announced the winners of the 2018 National Farmer, New Entrant into Commercial Agriculture and Agriculturist of the Year. The main sponsors of the event is Bayer, Santam Agriculture, Sanlam and Rovic Leers.

The three national winners are:

The 2018 National Farmer of the Year is Pieter Graaff, a farmer from Ceres in the Western Cape.

The 2018 New Entrant into Commercial Agriculture is Leonard Mavhugu, a farmer from the former Ciskei region of the Eastern Cape.

The 2018 Agriculturist of the Year is Wandile Sihlobo, an agricultural economist from Gauteng.

Annually, the Agricultural Writers SA acknowledge outstanding achievements of commercial farmers, new entrants into commercial agriculture, and agriculturists. 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 the award recipients also impact on the broader economy of the country and the southern African region.

This year's candidates were:

Agriculturist of the Year

- Gauteng – Wandile Sihlobo
- Limpopo – Frits van Oudtshoorn
- Mpumalanga – Johann du Preez
- Western Cape – Prof. Eugene Cloete

New Entrant into Commercial Agriculture

- Eastern Cape - Leonard Mavhugu
- Gauteng - Mbali Nkabinde
- Western Cape – Wayne Mansfield

Farmer of the Year

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

- North West – Johan Styger
- Western Cape – Pieter Graaff

“Every day we are met with the challenge of feeding a growing world population. With these awards, Agricultural Writers SA 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, success and food security in our lovely country,” said Magda du Toit, chairperson of the Agricultural Writers SA.

“The ultimate measure of a person is not what they do in moments of comfort and convenience, but rather what they do during times of challenge and crisis. That shows resilience and that is the match that ignites hope, excellence, innovation and forward thinking. And that is what all our regional winners managed to do.”

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More about the 2018 Agricultural Writers SA’s award candidates:

Johann du Preez

2018 Agriculturist of the Year in Mpumalanga

Johann du Preez is a pioneer in mango production 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 he has been the 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’ was done with positive results that 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 mangoes 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.

Wandile Sihlobo

2018 Agriculturist of the Year in Gauteng and National Agriculturist of the Year

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 forms 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 on Pres. Cyril Ramaphosa's advisory panel, who advises and supports the inter-ministerial committee on land reform.

Frits van Oudtshoorn

2018 Agriculturist of the year in Limpopo

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 grass species and the natural veld and this passion led to him publishing two books on this topic - "*Gids tot Grasse van Suider Afrika*" and "*Veldbestuur – Beginsels en Praktyke*". The first was published in 1991, when he was only 26 years of age, and the latter in 2015.

Although Frits studied Agricultural Extension after school. He 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.

Prof Eugene Cloete

2018 Agriculturist of the Year in the Western Cape

Prof. Eugene Cloete has played an integral part in formulating a plant biotechnology strategy for South Africa. He set up the very first Biotechnology Innovation Centre (BioPAD) in South Africa which led to the establishment of a Plant Biotechnology Innovation Centre that played a significant role, under his leadership, in developing policy that governs the use of genetically modified crops in SA.

Cloete established the Water Institutes at the University of Pretoria and Stellenbosch University. These institutes are major contributors to irrigation research and water management practices that have a direct impact on agriculture in SA. He was responsible for setting up the NEPAD Water Centres of Excellence (CoE), together with the Department of Science and Technology. The NEPAD initiative co-ordinates water research through water centres of excellence in numerous SADC countries.

Cloete currently chairs the advisory committee of the Centre for Invasion Biology (CIB) which focuses on alien invasions and their negative impact on ecosystems, including agriculture. The centre also has major projects on working for water which has a direct impact on agriculture.

He also devised a method for treating highly contaminated water run-off from a cattle feedlot using aquaculture to produce fish harvested as a cheap source of protein. He recently developed and commercialised a wastewater treatment system for wine cellar effluent, minimising the impact of the wine industry on the environment.

Cloete is an elected Fellow of the American Academy for Microbiology, the International Water Association and a Senior Fellow of the Water Institute of South Africa. He is a former associate editor of world renowned scientific magazine *Water Research* and the editor of the journal *Critical Reviews in Microbiology*.

Baynes Estate

2018 Farmer of the Year in KwaZulu-Natal

The farming company Joseph Baynes Estate (Pty) Ltd operates on a 9 300ha farm called Baynesfield Estate, 25km 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. He 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 350ha of arable land that provides maize for a company feed mill that produces 1 200 tons of feed for the piggery and cattle feed lot per month. In addition, the company has 200ha of avocado orchards and is a joint shareholder in an avocado pack shed packing nearly 1 million cartons per season.

The company strives to embrace new technologies to improve its biological productivity and has strategically and proactively set itself up to minimize risk. They mitigate risk by insuring the business has scale, is integrated but also diversified. They also focus on products which they believe will give them 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 custodian of the Blue Swallow and Oribi.

Johan Styger

2018 Farmer of the Year in North West

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 proactively 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 well informed 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.

Mahela Group

2018 Farmer of the year in Limpopo

The Mahela Boerdery has various business interests grouped together under the Mahela Group name. The farming enterprise was established in 1942 by the late BJ Vorster and is now in the hands of the third generation. The name "Mahela" was given to BJ Vorster by the local people for an individual who acts quickly and takes no nonsense. This was the way this business had grown ever since.

Today Mahela owns 8 326 ha of land and lease another 1 364 ha. They farm with citrus, subtropical fruits, a livestock and game division. In total Mahela produces around 70 000 tons of citrus as well as 10 000 tons 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 (a juice company), Houers Koöperatief Beperk (a carton manufacturer), Destrimix (a chemical company), an OK Minimart and liquor store, a fuel station and a franchise take-away restaurant.

The 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 Peoples' Trust to establish soft citrus on 110 ha of their land, which will be part of a 300ha soft citrus project close to Ohrigstad. About 170 ha, of which 100 ha are under nets, has already been 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!

Pieter Graaff

2018 Farmer of the Year in the Western Cape and National Farmer of the Year

Peter Graaff took over the farming business, Witzenberg Properties, just outside Ceres from his father dr. Jan Graaff, in 1984. Under his leadership five farming units were added to the original farm resulting in better productivity and an increase in the total turnover and profit. Pieter Graaff also expanded his farming business vertically into the complete value chain.

The six farming units are all situated in four unique climate zones within the Ceres area, spreading the climate risk of the farming business. Each of the six units are operated independently with its own infrastructure. The combined production of the separate farming units makes Pieter Graaff the single largest individual apple producer in South Africa.

Other farming activities includes the cultivation of pears, nectarines, peaches, cherries, wine grapes, vegetables, grain, forestry with a sawmill, cattle, sheep and a thoroughbred stud.

Since the onset of his career, Pieter Graaff has made the conscious decision to rather be "a small fish in a big ocean, as opposed to being "a big fish in a small pond".

Unlike many other entrepreneurial farming companies, Witzenberg Properties chose to develop in partnership rather than alone. With this philosophy a business was built with far greater influence across the whole value chain.

Witzenberg Properties has a proud tradition of taking care of its people. It is an employee of choice within the greater Ceres area and renowned for a company where people work until retirement. It provides employee benefits beyond the minimum requirements, to provide every employee of Witzenberg Properties the opportunity to live a life of dignity.

Mbali Nkabinde

2018 New entrant into commercial farming of the Year in Gauteng

Mbali Nkabinde obtained her BCom degree in psychology from the University of Johannesburg but decided to change her career path by rather entering the agricultural sector. 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 10-year lease agreement for the 14 ha farm in Boksburg. She has installed drip irrigation on 7 ha and erected 10 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 Sage's 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 land and wants to employ more people. She currently employs 7 people full time and 10 contract workers.

Leonard Mavhugu

2018 New entrant to commercial farming of the Year in the Eastern Cape and National New entrant to commercial farming of the Year

Leonard Mavhugu is the senior production manager for the transformation dairy business Amadlelo Agri, based in the former Ciskei region of the Eastern Cape. It is a job that puts him in the driving seat of a three-farm operation, running close to 4 000 cows in milk off 1 100 ha (a milking platform of 850 ha with 250 ha of supplementary pasture) with a staff of roughly 100.

A small-town boy from Thohoyandou, in the north-eastern corner of the Soutpansberg, Mavhugu graduated from the Technical University of Tshwane with a diploma in Animal Production. At the age of 26, Leonard was recruited by a group of dairy farmers who were working towards transformation in the dairy sector through a black-empowered, agri-business Amadlelo Agri. At 27 Leonard became the *de facto* site supervisor and then manager of Amadlelo's Fort Hare dairy outside Alice in the Eastern Cape.

He has considerable experience (15 years) in pasture-based dairy farming which requires constant, and intelligent, attention to the balance between grass, cows and milk.

Respected by the Eastern Cape's dairy fraternity as a highly competent dairy farmer, and called by some a top operator, Leonard is doing a job that requires skills far in advance of those of good pasture and stock management. Mavhugu is driven, focused and knowledgeable, and sets a fine example of the high standards he expects his staff to meet.

Wayne Mansfield

2018 New entrant into commercial farming of the Year in the Western Cape

Wayne Mansfield from Pniel, just outside Stellenbosch, entered the agricultural sector as a young boy when he helped his father after school and over weekends to sell fruit for pocket money. After school he started selling and packing second class fruit and established a good network of contacts in the fruit industry. It was during this time that his path crossed with that of Donald Mouton, farm manager at Fairview.

About nine years ago Donald asked Wayne for the first time to start a lemon orchard on a small piece of land on the farm. At first, Wayne was hesitant as he knew nothing of farming and only after the third request he agreed.

In 2013 Wayne entered in to a 15-year lease contract with Charles Back, the owner of Fairview, to farm on 12 ha. At that stage only 6,9 ha was under Eureka lemon trees, but the orchard was quite neglected and overgrown with invasive species. For the first two years Wayne spent most of his time rehabilitating and cleaning the orchard.

Although Wayne knew little about farming, he managed to increase production year on year, and in 2017 he increased his exports with 400%.

Today, the lemon orchards of Fruitfield Farming cover 11,9 ha and yields about 280 tons.

Wayne attributed his success to the assistance and guidance of fellow farmers, his own love of learning new things and the grace of God.