

Hortgro Awards honours deciduous fruit industry champions

The Hortgro Awards, which honour excellence in the South African deciduous fruit industry, were held on 6 June 2023 at STIAS, Stellenbosch. The awards, which are hosted by Hortgro, recognise individuals and organisations that have made significant contributions to the industry.



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This year's awards were particularly special, as they were the first to be held in a new format. The new format focuses on the Pome and Stone fruit industries, which are the two main fruit industries in South Africa. The awards also included a new category, the OSH Reinecke Frontrunner Award, which recognises young leaders in the industry.

The winners in the different categories were

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Izethelo Media Award: Brand Republic for 'Meer as Grond'

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The production house, Brand Republic, received the Izethelo Award for the television series, *Meer as Grond* (VIA/kykNET). Viewers followed in-depth conversations on critical agricultural issues such as farm safety, drought, energy crisis, natural resources, transformation, water scarcity and many more. What agriculture means to our country, its people and how do we ensure food safety and security.

The issues investigated were complex with no simple answers, says Elise-Marie Steenkamp, group manager: communications, Hortgro. "Hortgro offered programme proposals and Brand Republic ran with it. The result was four top-quality television programmes about various aspects of the deciduous fruit industry. The quality of television improved the image of the industry and ensured constructive engagement between the fruit industry and the media."



Source: Supplied

Daan Strydom Research and Technology Award: Henk Griessel

Hortgro's first Daan Strydom Research and Technical prize was awarded to Henk Griessel in recognition and appreciation of a career dedicated to the deciduous fruit industry in the field of postharvest quality of pome fruit.

Griessel, quality assurance manager, at Tru-Cape, was described as a true industry servant who tirelessly and selflessly over many years provided direction and key technical and strategic input to various industry workgroups and advisory committees that determine research needs and priorities and assisted with the evaluation of the outcomes and results of research projects.

Hortgro Transformation Award: Western Cape Department of Agriculture

Transformation does not happen in a vacuum, continues Steenkamp. "Over many years the Western Cape Department of Agriculture was there to support Hortgro's transformation initiatives.

"From the original "Boompie" Project to the latest Jobs Fund Initiatives, WCDA was always a valued industry partner. The WCDA also utilised Hortgro's capacity to act as an implementing agent as part of the commodity approach to promote black economic empowerment throughout the value chain."

Since 2011, the industry, in collaboration with the WCDA, has invested R325m in economic development. Of the funds,

60% were allocated to outright (100%) black-owned entities, while 40% goes to shared equity initiatives. Successes include poverty alleviation through job creation that contributes to food security, increased production and exports and long-term sustainable economic and rural development.

"The unique partnership between Hortgro and the WCDA became a recipe for success with similar initiatives being motivated in other provinces and a model whereby other industries' funds are administered. With this award, Hortgro would like to acknowledge the Western Cape Department of Agriculture for their dedication and support in making a transformation in the deciduous fruit industry an economic and sustainable reality," says Steenkamp.

Hortgro Chairman's Award: Dr Leon von Mollendorff

Leon von Mollendorff worked at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) for several years in various leadership positions, before being appointed as the first general manager of Culdevco in 2006, where he served until his retirement in 2022.

His research: Postharvest factors involved in the development of woolliness in nectarines is considered ground-breaking and for this, he received special recognition from the University of California in the USA.

"In the industry, Leon is known as an excellent researcher, formidable negotiator, marketer, and someone who knows how to build networks. His work as a cultivar developer is highly regarded worldwide. It was a privilege to work with Leon."



Source: Supplied



Source: Supplied

1662 Industry Award: Joy van Biljon

The 1662 award commemorates the first apples that were harvested in the Company Garden at the Cape in that year on 17 April. Joy van Biljon, one of the founding members of the Koue Bokkeveld Training Centre, also known as KBOS, had the vision to change agriculture through training. After 20 years as KBOS executive chief, she stepped down in 2020 and handed over the reins to Carmen Roberts.

"Her legacy has made KBOS a beacon of inspiration and hope in the agricultural industry—envied by other regions and industries.

"Over a lifetime of service, van Biljon played a pivotal role in positioning training in the commercial sector in such a way that it makes both economic sense and empowers those being trained for a career in agriculture," says Steenkamp.

Van Biljon also played a significant role in helping the deciduous fruit industry, and specifically in advising and assisting Hortgro, in sustaining the learning and development department.

OSH Reinecke Frontrunner Award 2022: Grant Smuts

Grant Smuts, a stone fruit producer and owner of Smuts Bros. Robertson, has served on the deciduous fruit industry's Research Council since 1998, later as chairman of the Hortgro Science Advisory Board. Today, he continues to provide valuable input on the Hortgro Stone board as vice-chair.

Smuts also serves on several other industry boards and committees: director of Hortgro Stone, as well as a board member of the Canning Fruit Growers Association (CFPA), and he also serves on the board of directors of the Ashton Fruit Producers Cooperative – where he played a leading role in negotiations with Tiger Foods last year.

"Beyond decades-long service to the industry, Smuts is also an industry leader in the Robertson region. During unrest between foreign workers in the Robertson area, Smuts led the talks with the government and other stakeholders.

"Over many decades Smuts has been the flag bearer for the stone fruit industry. He is a great supporter of research in good times and bad, a sounding board that balances and always brings with him calm wisdom.

"In addition to his service to the industry, he also expanded his own agribusiness from a family farm to a mega-business, where he is known for valuing the interests of his workers," says Steenkamp.



Source: Supplied

OSH Reinecke Frontrunner Award 2023: Kobus Eigelaar

Achtervelei Farm on Piket-Bo-Berg is home to Kobus Eigelaar – a pome and stone fruit producer of stature and selfless giver of his time and guidance to his community and to the industry.

Eigelaar has served on various industry boards for over thirty years. Hortgro Stone (formerly SASPA) – 1997 to present. Hortgro Pome (formerly SAAPPA) – from 2018 to present, as well as a Culdevco director (2007 – 2022).

His journey includes the deregulation of industry, and he, therefore, understands the value of industry organisations that must protect and promote the common interests of producers.

"We know Eigelaar as a straight talker. But one that plays the issue on the table, not the man. He is someone who has his fellow producers' best interests at heart and acts in the interest of the larger industry. He understands international trade and the impact of geopolitics and over the years has made an important contribution to improving the producer's profitability and competitiveness through collective actions," says Steenkamp.

"Kobus is an advocate and big supporter of research and the development of technology to help producers farm more sustainably. It is a great honour to recognise Kobus for all the years of selfless service he has rendered at the industry level."

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