



HORTGRO

New Roots

an industry in transition
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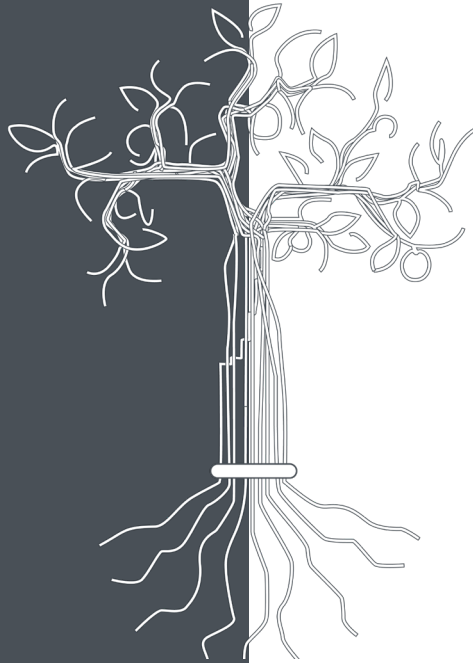
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The Root Map

Nurturing new roots

Foreword by Cynthia Mahlathi,
Economic Development Manager



In today's rapidly evolving landscape, transformation and post development support cannot be overstated. In this issue, I invite you to the nurturing of the new roots (and routes) to build sustainable growth. This is a journey that requires understanding, collaboration, and a deep appreciation for the unique challenges and opportunities faced by the deciduous fruit industry. With its vibrant orchards and bountiful harvests (at times), it represents not only a vital economic pillar but also a symbol of growth and potential. It is through this understanding that we can cultivate meaningful solutions and provide the necessary support to drive the industry towards a sustainable and inclusive future.

***New Roots* serves as a compass for navigating the development and support journey that lies ahead.**

We bring together a diverse range of voices, perspectives, and experiences, providing a platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

By uniting producers, industry experts, researchers, and stakeholders, we aim to foster a collective understanding of the needs that drive transformation and the role each of us can play in facilitating meaningful progress and impact.



At the heart of our collective journey lies the unwavering commitment to providing impactful assistance. I believe that true transformation is not achieved through isolated efforts but through collaborative initiatives that amplify the voices of those most affected. By listening, learning, and engaging with the industry's stakeholders, we can tailor our support to address their specific needs.

Through *New Roots*, we aim to cultivate and nurture a community that is driven by empathy, resilience, and a shared vision of an inclusive deciduous fruit industry. I invite you to immerse yourself

in the stories, insights, and strategies shared within these pages. Let them inspire you to embark on your own journey and join us in shaping a future where the deciduous fruit industry flourishes sustainably, inclusively, and harmoniously.

As we forge ahead, armed with knowledge and a commitment to making a difference, let us nurture these new roots, laying the foundation for a more resilient and prosperous industry. Together, we can sow the seeds and cultivate a harvest that benefits not only the growers and stakeholders but also the communities.

Cynthia at the Tissue Culture Facility (TCF), Bernheim Farm



The smart thing is to ask for help



Wimpie Pause, chairperson of the Fruit Workers' Development Trust (FWDT) says the goal of the trust is to improve the lives of the trust's beneficiaries who are agricultural workers on fruit farms. "The trust supports projects that are aligned with the trust's goals and addresses challenges in our communities."

Since its inception the FWDT has improved the lives of many fruit farm workers.

Up to date there are over 40 beneficiary farms and up to 1 500 registered previously disadvantaged workers benefitting from the project.

FWDT appointed a company, Agrifusion and Steven Hobson is their consultant managing their investments, trading their shares. This process has grown the value of the trust substantially, and the purpose is purely to offer an aid to the beneficiaries. This aid can be in the form of cash dividends, or sometimes when a farm identifies a need, say for chairs for their community hall, funds will be made available.



**Overcoming abuse
is a huge victory for
the affected worker
and for the farm.**

Colleen Willemse
GBV Workshop Attendee

The third way of coming to the aid of the beneficiaries is to address the challenges of social deterioration. FWDT responded to high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) by initiating workshops on deciduous fruit farms. The project was launched in 2021, on more than 40 farms in the Western Cape, with more than 1000 participants taking part. The main aim is to make workers aware that it is not a shame to ask for help. There were huge eye-openers for the attendees and the workshop ignited life-changing actions.

This year the focus is on alcoholism and substance abuse with tik (crystal meth) leading the pack. The approach of the programme is to stick to the subject and give continuous information and on-going guidance, offering abusers the option to come and ask for help.

To get through to them to admit they have a problem. That they need help. As with the GDV project the alcoholism and substance abuse project will also be in association with Procure, one of the leading emotional wellness companies in South Africa, offering an innovative, practical and hands-on approach to psycho-social wellness.

Social deterioration operates on a domino effect. Alcoholism or substance abuse are more often than not escapism from another problem. A low self-esteem or depression, for instance. And then there is cause and effect. Because of abuse, nutrition suffers, finances suffer. And so the imbalance can go on and on. Unless you ask for help. Because whatever the issue, asking for help is the smart thing to do.

The aim of the Fruit Workers' Development Trust is to offer the opportunities on an on-going basis to ask for, and get the help.

See more here



Co-operation between Hortgro and PALS getting even stronger



Front: Lennox Plaatjies, Anton Rabe; Middle: Micheal Brinkhuis, Gerrit van Vuuren, Cynthia Mahlathi, Caitlyn Abdoll, Reinette van Staden; Back: Louis van Zyl, Mariette Kotzé, Milan Mogashoa

Like-mindedness between organisations in the same industry is a blessing. That is for sure the case with Hortgro and Partners in Agri Land Solutions (PALS). Although Hortgro focuses on pome- and stone-fruit production and PALS has become a national organisation catering for all types of agricultural enterprises, its roots are firmly within the fruit industry as it originated early in 2015 in Witzenberg, pure pome- and stone-fruit country. And both organisations truly believe in developing agriculture for all South African farmers in a practical, merit-based and honest manner.

Therefore Hortgro and PALS have recently (7 June 2023) formalised an agreement to collaborate on economic development within the sector. This partnership with PALS will extend beyond the Western Cape borders to other provinces such as Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and Free State. This partnership enables the economic participation of historically excluded groups and individuals to grow the industry in an inclusive and responsible manner, helping to improve economic development, job creation, food security, custodianship and social harmony.



To BBEE or not to be

- Cultipowered

On 1 April 2022 Culdevco formed Cultipowered NPC and restructured its shareholding for Cultipowered NPC to become the majority shareholder, owning 51% of Culdevco. This empowerment initiative enabled Culdevco to become a Level Two BEE business.

The main objective of Cultipowered, through its majority shareholding in Culdevco, is to facilitate, support and fund empowerment and transformation within the fruit industries Culdevco represents, and thereby strengthening the fabric of society. This opens new doors for co-operation with a multitude of stakeholders, including the government, state departments and especially the ARC, whose deciduous fruit cultivars Culdevco has been commercialising exclusively for many years.

Cultipowered aims to develop, facilitate, and fund initiatives for stakeholders within the deciduous fruit industry, including training, supporting and giving assistance to suitably qualify and upskill stakeholders in order to start and manage businesses in the fruit industry.

It will also lobby support for the growth of stakeholders with government departments like the Department of Trade and Industries as well as the Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities.

Furthermore, Cultipowered will focus on establishing scholarships, bursaries, awards and loans for studies, research, and teachings which their independent board determines would be in the furtherance of the interests of the relevant fruit industries. In general, it will also promote and coordinate equitable access and participation within the value chain in, and for the fruit industries while conducting administrative functions and tasks in the furtherance of the objects of the company.

At present Cultipowered has four directors: Porchia Carstens, independent chairperson, Sewis van der Horst, director from the pome-fruit industry, Simone Oliphant (raisins) and Willem Pausse (pome- and stone-fruit industries).

Porchia Carstens, independent chairperson and business owner of the public relations agency, pH Comms, comments:

“Our strategy includes the facilitation of price competitive and affordable access to quality and appropriate cultivars for black growers, which will increase their competitive advantage.”

This restructuring aligns the partnership of the five primary producer groups in the South African deciduous fruit industry and the ARC with the objectives of the National Growth Plan and the responsibilities ascribed to agriculture in the form of inclusive growth and transformation.

For this current financial year, Cultipowered are getting their apples in a row, but looking ahead they are going to earn 51% of the dividends of Culdevco, derived from all the new cultivar developments between Culdevco and ARC.

“Cultipowered is a new structure, but we are in this for the long haul. Empowerment takes time but the board is already in the process of assisting two farmers to sustainably grow their businesses and supporting skills development initiatives for students who are serious about developing their careers in the fruit sector.”



Creating production managers and young leaders through skills development



Astrid Arendse is part of the human resources division at Hortgro where she manages, amongst other tasks, the Learning and Development Department offering a number of programs. One is the Hortgro bursary program for undergraduates. At present there are 35 students from different universities, technikons and colleges, studying in a variety of agricultural directions. One other programme is the mentorship program for interns, who need to complete the practical part of their qualifications that addresses the huge gap between the academic and working world.

Then there is the Young Leaders Programme. It is all about sustainability, because at present the agricultural industry is loaded with experts with a wealth of knowledge, but many of them are close to retirement. This program's aim is to ensure that this goldmine of knowledge is not lost and enables the candidates to get inside

knowledge on the industry, its structures, building networks and meeting with industry leaders. Candidates are selected from various spheres in the industry and the first program which runs over two years with 20 young leaders will conclude in a overseas trip later this year to learn how South Africa connects with the international market and if we are on par with the rest of the agricultural world.

There is also the Leadership Development Programme for Production Managers in the agricultural sector. It was developed in conjunction with Mazars and funded by the Agricultural Sector Education Training Authority (AgriSETA). The idea was sparked by realising that many production managers started off as general workers and grew in the business with regards to their skills and leadership abilities and not always through formal training. "We developed a program where the outcome is an

individual development plan indicating strengths and development areas and equipping the group with knowledge and leadership skills required to strengthen their management skills.”

“But for me, the most important part is that they develop a network, which enables them to tap into each other’s skills and abilities. This way they learn from one another and create lifelong networks and friendships long after they’ve finished the program ” Astrid explains.

Astrid’s department sends an invitation to farms to nominate production managers to participate in the training. The program is spread over six weeks through blended learning with some

class time as well as online sessions. Once completed, they have a feedback session where they present what they’ve learnt and how it improved their capabilities. This takes place at a graduation ceremony where they are awarded with a certificate of completion.

Almost without exception, the employers of the production managers comment on what a difference the course makes to the managers when they resume their duties after the course.

Since the programme started in 2019 a total of 87 participants completed the program with the next group starting in July 2023.

“Out of the courses my staff have completed this is the one that has added the most value, one would need to look long and hard to find a better offer in South Africa”

Pieter Rabe, Head of HR Suiderland Plase

“This course is highly recommended; it not only made a positive impact for my team but also identified additional areas of development.”

Charl Koole (Dennegeur)

Production managers, Class of 2020



How winning AGT got Jasmine Bones back on the pitch

Jasmine Bones' grandma, Sanna Bones was always singing, and Jasmine was almost always with her, singing along. Like the ABBA song states: "I began to sing long before I could talk ..."

Her mom, Gertruida Koopman, was the conductor and promoter of their farm choir, the Golden Voices. As youngster, Jasmine herself was one of those golden voices. On merit and on pitch. At one stage they needed to reduce the choir to four voices only, also for a competition like AGT. They were from then on known as the Golden Voices Quartet. Singing has always been the harmony of her life.

Until the untimely death of Jan Fredericks, the quartet's bass. It had such an effect on them that the three remaining members just disbanded. The songs ended.

Apart from wanting to sing, Jasmine always had the dream of becoming a social worker, especially wanting to look after and help children. This passion arose because she has a handicapped younger brother, Marquin Nel and it

was difficult for the family to cope. Jasmine always wished she could do more, knew more on how to look after him.

However, with the abrupt end of the quartet, and the economy making things tougher, Jasmine decided to put her study dreams on the backburner and help out at home and on the farm Dennekruin in the Witzenberg Valley.

She was a sapling worker responsible for orchard architecture and pruning when Niklaas Hanekom, a foreman on Dennekruin showed her the advertisement for AGT. Against where her head was, she followed her heart and entered the competition. And chose the most perfect song.

"It's all coming back to me now," by Celine Dion.

Wow, did it all come back to her! She won and her life changed.



"I even had tea with Minister Ivan Meyer!" she exclaims. "And I sang at the Worker of the Year function at Grand West. I also recorded five songs at a studio in Stellenbosch for YouTube."



During the training and build-up leading to the final evening of AGT, Jasmine had many discussions with the organisers and Procure's advisors asking what she really wants to be and do. She told them to become a social worker looking after kids has been her yearning for a very long time. "Go for your dreams," AGT taught her. So as an interim step she applied at De Eike School, also on Dennekruin, helping as a sport's coach and giving the kids active breaks between periods to stimulate their oxidation. "And don't forget the choir. I am slowly but surely putting a school choir together," she adds.

"If I didn't take part in AGT, I would not have done any of this. I just would have carried on as it was. My next step is to enrol at college to qualify as a social worker. For the children." And if Jasmine ever sings in AGT again, it might just be Colin Buchanan's "For the children's sake".

*The kids took me from the staffroom
To the bush where they played
A world of cubbies,
of brave companions
Of secret hideaways
The joy of childhood
They shared with me
I was reminded of imagination
And the world the children see*

*There's a wealth of life so easily
just left behind to rot*

*We say we reached maturity,
we seem to miss a lot*

*We'd be a whole lot better off
if we took the time*

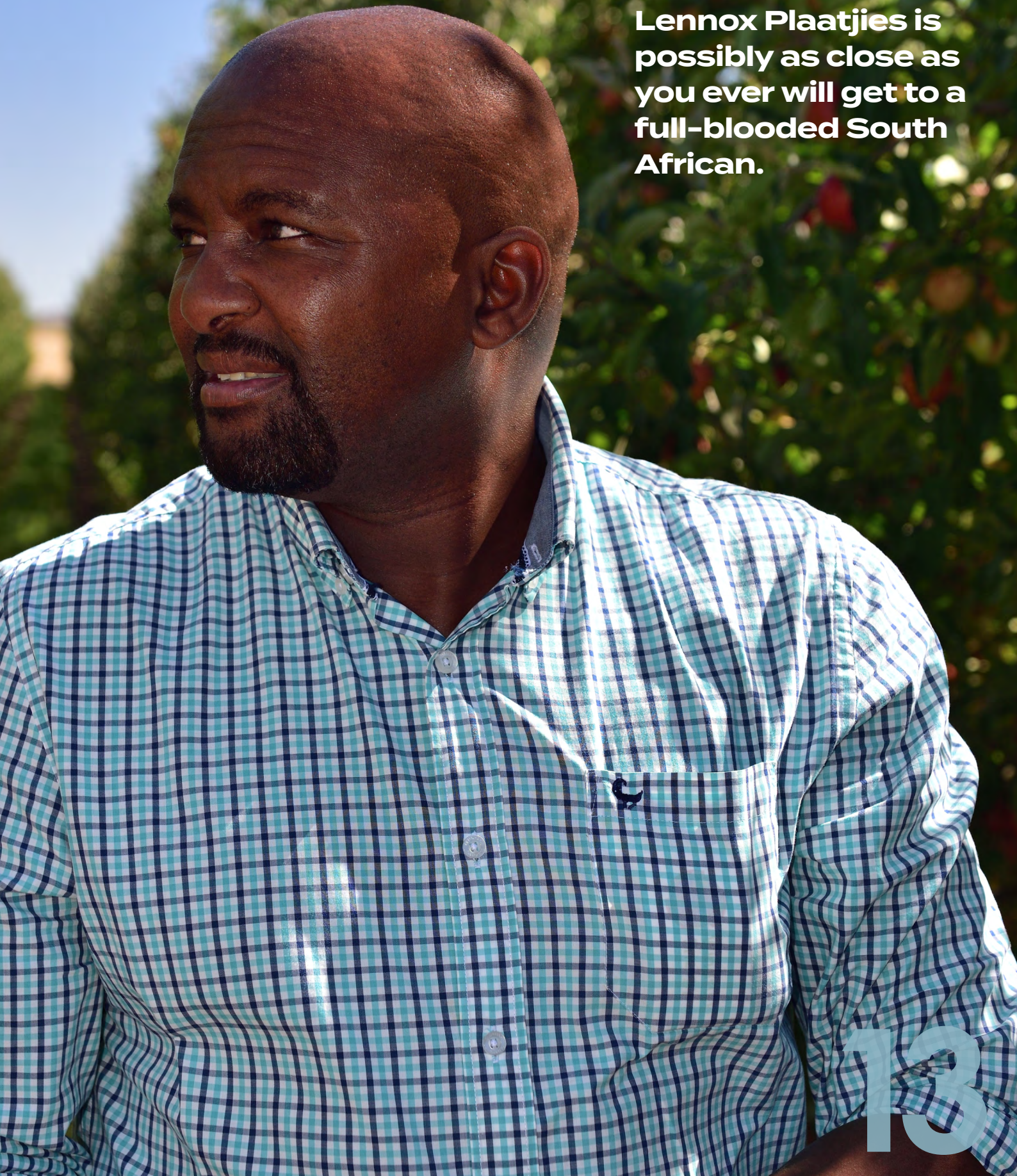
To share our lives with our children ...



From warden to custodian

- Profile - Lennox Plaatjies

Lennox Plaatjies is possibly as close as you ever will get to a full-blooded South African.



He was born from Xhosa parents but grew up in Wolseley in the Western Cape where he went to school. In Afrikaans. Which he learnt not only to speak fluently, but colloquially to a tee. Today, apart from isiXhosa and Afrikaans, he also speaks, English, SeSotho, isiZulu and Setswana fluently.

Lennox worked for 18 years for the South African Department of Correctional Services, beginning as a warden at Dwarsrivier Correctional Centre in Wolseley. It only took him eight years to become the Head of Centre in 2010. During the farm riots in 2012 rumours started spreading that the inmates at Dwarsrivier will be set free to start plundering and destroying farms. So, Lennox invited all those farmers and took them through the prison facility, showing them how orderly and well-structured everything was managed, and thus putting their minds at ease that nothing of the kind was about to happen.



In 2005 Lennox needed some legal advice and met local attorney Gerrit van Vuuren, almost a decade before Partners in Agri Land Solutions (PALS) was founded. However, around the time in 2012 when Lennox showcased the prison to the farmers, the idea of PALS started taking shape. Some of these farmers mentioned Lennox's name as a perfect candidate to help bring black new-generation and established white farmers together in partnerships.

In his latter years employed by the SA Department of Correctional Services, Lennox was travelling all over South Africa doing development training at many prisons, helping inmates to improve their lives and skills. Eventually he left the Department and became a lecturer at Emerging Leaders, a UK based NGO doing leadership development training in rural areas as part of the value chain development of UK-based retailer, Marks and Spencer.

“That’s exactly what we need, for farmers and communities to start working together to solve the land issue.

“A no-brainer, I said to myself.”

Brothers ML and Cobus Gerldenhuys flanking Lennox Plaatjies

“Through the Emerging Leaders programmes, I had the opportunity to help unlocking the potential of others, while what got me going on the PALS journey was the fact that I could create opportunities for people who previously never had any,”Lennox explains.

“My father was a farm worker in the Koue Bokkeveld and it was unthinkable then that his son would one day end up helping other farm workers to become commercial farmers.”

In 2013 Lennox and Gerrit's paths crossed again at a meeting with political leaders where Gerrit was explaining the proposed PALS framework.

“That’s exactly what we need, for farmers and communities to start working together to solve the land issue. A no-brainer, I said to myself.”

Therefore in 2015 Lennox joined PALS. He became the CEO of Witzenberg PALS from September 2015 to April 2018 and today he is the National Public Liaison Officer of SAPALS.

But that's not all. Lennox wears two PALS hats. He is also a new-generation partner in Bambisane, a PALS agricultural project in the Theronberg area in partnership with Gielie Geldenhuys and his family. Originally the partnership was between Gielie and Oom Tommy Mona who was a pastor, chief of the Xhosas in the Western Cape and a director of Witzenberg PALS. The future looked brilliant. Black and white. Hand in hand. A dream for Gielie and Oom Tommy came true. Then unexpectedly, Oom Tommy passed away in 2020, having never really seen his first harvest. Gielie approached Lennox and asked him to help keep this vision of an inclusive PALS project alive.

The show goes on and Lennox keeps going from strength to strength.





Find the recordings for the 2023 Research Showcase and Postharvest Symposium on the Hortgro YouTube page.

RESEARCH SHOWCASE and POSTHARVEST SYMPOSIUM



Pome fruit day



Stone fruit day



Postharvest Symposium

