

HORTGRO

Growing Fruit IQ



New Roots

an industry in transition

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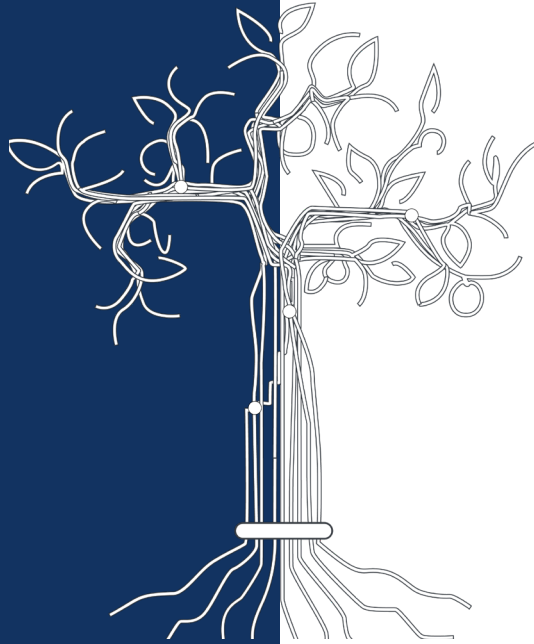
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How to inflate your farming business



In 2014 Theo van Rooyen was desperate, looking for a way to earn a proper living. That's when he found this portion of government land near the town of Op-die-Berg in the Koue Bokkeveld that was not in use at all. Without talking to any of the authorities he pulled in and set up a woodwork business. Sometimes a man's got to do what a man's got to do.

"A year later the municipality paid me a visit, telling me this was their land. So I asked them how much they wanted for it, because I was not going to leave. I was helping quite a lot of people with employment by then. If I leave what about them? So in good faith I put in an offer of R3 million and it got accepted! What now?"

That's where Raymond Gibson and Partners in Agri Land Solutions (PALS) enter the tale. Raymond footed the bill and PALS constructed the partnership called TSR Farming with Raymond as 49% shareholder and Theo (Mr T) and his wife Susanna (Ms S) owning 51%. And Raymond being the R in TSR.

"Using Raymond's infrastructure and mentorship, we planted our first 5 ha of pears without any government grants. Today we farm 8 ha of Packham's Triumph and Forelle pears as well as 7 ha of apples made up of Bingo, Gala, Royal Beaut, Big Bucks, Cripps Red, Rosy Glow and Early Reds."

With his interest moving into farming, the more mountainous area where he was conducting his woodwork business from, became unused and his woodworkers moved over to the farming. Yet, it was part of the land that TSR acquired.

So he decided to add some value and in the process help his three daughters, Fiona, Shirley and Claudia with some extra income opportunities. They created Kleinvlei Padkamp, a function venue and potential campsite.

“We do a lot of end-of-year functions and matric farewell pre-drinks and after-parties here. Weddings and conferences. We had the Graaff group here just the other day. No, not for a wedding, but a day conference and teambuilding.

“At present we are fully booked till end of January for events and parties. We have decent braai facilities, we put up a lot of

fun inflatables like jumping castles, slides and things. Plus of course, the swimming pool.

The locals love the place.

The kids go crazy there! The seasonal workers are always coming around for their end-of-term parties. Then there is also the hiking trail on Oskop, the mountain behind us which is actually part of Tierberg. It’s a great 10 km walk, ending right here in the swimming pool.”

Less than 10 years ago Theo was in a bind, desperate to find a way of providing for his family. Today he is not only a successful new-era farmer, but he added value to his business by developing Kleinvlei Padkamp, which is still a work in progress, getting better and better, offering more and more. And in the process he added value and a lot of fun to his local community by turning Kleinvlei into a very cool hotspot.

To find out more and to book your own event at Kleinvlei Padkamp, call Theo on 083 275 7298/ email him at tsr@howbill.co.za





STRENGTH IN COLLABORATION

by Cynthia Mahlathi

In the heart of the deciduous fruit industry, a dynamic generation of producers is emerging, infusing innovation, resilience, and a fresh perspective into the sector. This vibrant community is reshaping the landscape, navigating challenges, and planting the seeds of success.

The industry has undergone a fundamental change, witnessing emerging producers diversifying their enterprises and embracing sustainable practices. While this shift is promising, the necessity for capacity building becomes evident, providing essential support and knowledge resources for long-term sustainability.

Despite the promising growth, emerging producers encounter challenges, limited access to coordinated resources, fluctuating market prices, climate uncertainties, as well as internal business management and institutional issues.

Tailored capacity building programmes become a lifeline, equipping producers with the tools to navigate the complexities successfully.

Capacity building initiatives, whether through training programmes or mentorship opportunities, empower producers to harness the latest technologies and management practices, fostering continuous innovation. This empowerment allows producers to make informed decisions, capitalise on high-quality produce demand, and strategically position themselves within the value chain.

The strength of our industry lies in collaboration. Emerging producers need to strengthen collaborations, form networks, and share insights, this is an area open for further expansion. Through investment in capacity building initiatives that facilitate collaborative learning, we can catalyse the impact of these networks, creating a supportive ecosystem where knowledge flows freely.

Capacity building extends beyond skill acquisition; it cultivates resilience and the ability to navigate industry dynamics.

Producers equipped with a diverse skill set, from risk management to sustainable farming practices, are better prepared to face uncertainties. Investing in the capacity of emerging producers improves the foundations of a robust and resilient deciduous fruit sector.

As we navigate these changes, the future of the deciduous fruit industry rests in the hands of emerging producers.

By addressing challenges, embracing innovation, fostering collaboration, and prioritising capacity building, we can create an environment where emerging producers not only survive but flourish. The roots they plant today, nurtured through capacity building and coordinated support, will bear the fruits of a resilient and prosperous industry tomorrow.

In the ever-evolving landscape of the deciduous fruit industry, the growth of emerging producers attests to the industry's adaptability and potential. Through targeted capacity building initiatives, we can ensure that emerging producers have the tools they need to thrive, ensuring a sustainable and fruitful future for all.

Western Cape scores 83% success rate in land reform report

Ivan Meyer, Western Cape provincial Minister of Agriculture released a research report by an independent research company, Phuhlisani Solutions.

The report found that 83% of the land reform farmers who received post-settlement support (PSS) from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) consider themselves to be successful agri-businesses.

This stands in sharp contrast to the national government's 90% failure rate.

“We are proud of the outcome of the latest round of evaluation of agricultural businesses and projects supported by the Western Cape Department of Agriculture’s post-settlement support programme,” said Minister Meyer.

He continued: “The success of land reform in the Western Cape is underpinned by the quality of extension services, training and financial support and mentoring received from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture and its industry partners.”

Western Cape Head of Agriculture, Dr Mogale Sebopetsa highlights that a key component of his department’s intervention to achieve these outcomes is the “commodity approach” which he said,

creates an ecosystem of support for successful land reform.

Dr Mogale said: “The Western Cape Department of Agriculture’s land reform success is underpinned by the partnership and collaboration it has with industry partners to strengthen support to our land reform farmers through the provision of commodity-specific extension support.”

“The evaluation confirms that the Western Cape Government’s approach to land reform is delivering the desired results for the beneficiaries and economy of the Western Cape.”

One such beneficiary is Pieter Mentoer who said: “The Western Cape Department of Agriculture has been supporting me on my journey to grow my business. This year I will be harvesting one hectare of produce for the first time and I have already planted another hectare. My business is growing and I consider myself blessed.”

The report also makes several recommendations.

These include that the WCDoA:

- reconsiders its role in coordinating PSS and assumes a pivotal role at provincial and district levels
- strongly asserts the need for it to be

involved in “pre-settlement” planning given the highly negative impacts which stem from its exclusion

- engage all players to find a solution to the delayed allocation of CASP funds
- draw in AgriWC and its members to play a stronger role in PSS
- play a more proactive role in addressing market access
- undertake a broader review of the WCDoA PSS programme – extending the focus beyond those producers that have received funding through CASP and Ilima Letsema.

Mariette Kotzé, Group Operations Manager at fruit industry body, Hortgro, a key commodity partner to the Western Cape Department of Agriculture said: “The report confirms real progress in developing farmers from smallholder farmers to becoming commercial farmers.

Regarding elements such as production, access to markets and finance, investing and growing the business and creating jobs, the department has been fairly successful.

“Commodity partners such as Hortgro now stand ready to assist the Department to tackle the issues highlighted in the recommendations,” Kotzé added.

“Land reform is one of the building blocks of our Growth for Jobs Strategy. We will now develop a management implementation plan to ensure that the recommendations in the report are implemented,” concluded Minister Meyer.

A copy of the report can be accessed at <https://www.elsenburg.com/publication/land-reform-evaluation-report-2019-2022/>



Dr Ivan Meyer and Mariette Kotzé

The
best
out
of
1031



After obtaining his matric in 1994, Vivian Jakobs's journey through the world of deciduous fruit began with him checking out the playing field. In 2000 he joined Swaarmood Boerdery in the Warm Bokkeveld. That's where he crossed paths with Jacques Visser and that's where his career started taking shape. Three months down the line he was promoted to packhouse manager.

In 2010 Jacques moved to Crispy's Farm Coshla, a BEE Farm of Dutoit Agri and less than a year later Vivian followed his mentor. He started as an assistant production manager, but was promoted to production manager in 2015.

“I've done a lot of courses along the way, but I learnt that, most of what I know today, came through by do-it-yourself. The best learning school ever!”

Earlier this year, Jacques nominated Vivian as a worthy entrant for the Department of Agriculture, Western Cape's Farmworker of the Year competition. This competition works in stages.

First of all, you have to prove your mettle in the middle management category in your own region. This is Witzenberg in the case of Vivian. Which he won and which got him into the next level in his region, the Best Agricultural Worker for Witzenberg. Which Vivian won as well.

This achievement got him into the next tier: Middle Management for the whole of Western Cape, all the various regions together.

Yes, which he has won. This catapulted him into the top level competition being the Best Agricultural Worker for the Western Cape.

And the winner is ... Vivian Jakobs, out of a total of 1031 contestants, Vivian went from one level to the next and walked away with top honours. You can surely agree he is next level.

Should you ask him about the future, he'll tell you a story, starting with his great-grandfather and his old Massey-Ferguson 135, “die rondkoppie” it was called.

“My grandpa then upgraded to the next Massey before my dad got the four trek. One day my dad said to me, you must aim higher than this four trek. You can do better. So, I'm aiming higher still. Not only in tractors, but in getting my own piece of land. Fingers in the soil, that's me. My dream, but if I can win this Agricultural Worker competition, I can do it.”

Should you ever be privileged to meet Vivian, you'll understand why he outdid everyone in the Agricultural Worker for the Western Cape competition. He has what it takes. And he didn't do it to win a competition, he did it to learn how to be better at what he is doing. To achieve the next level. And the next.

That is what makes him next level.



32 internships in 2023



The fruit industry internship project is managed by Kutsha (“new recruit” in Xhosa) in partnership with Hortgro and run by Lona Odendaal. She’s the one who opens farm gates and knock on packhouse doors to mobilise organisations to get on board and commit to changing the lives of young people. She conducts quarterly visits to each student, and checks in with the in-house mentors at each organisation to see how they are doing.

The aim of the project is to connect agricultural students to in-service training to meet their qualification requirements for graduation, and at the same time diversify the agricultural sector and develop a new cohort of farming professionals in the fruit industry.

Across the country thousands of students are unable to source and access in-service training opportunities to complete their qualifications. And when they are able to, they are often left to their own devices with little or no mentorship and structure, and thus soon slip out. This is a huge system inefficiency resulting in many of learners with incomplete qualifications, who are then unable to enter the workplace.

This internship project places students from TVET (technical and vocational education and training) colleges and

technical universities into in-service training opportunities on farms, packhouses and other related organisations. Graduates also get an opportunity for work experience which might lead to a permanent position, depending on their performance during the internship period. A key component of the program is the strong mentorship focus ensuring that students feel supported, are able to grow, and gain appropriate workplace experience. The mentor program provides life skills training to the students using the BrightStar LifeStyle curriculum.

At the end of the year, students prepare presentations on their experience of the year. Farmers, managers and mentors are invited to attend – a wonderful way to reflect and create a learning journey for all.

The project started in 2010 with only five students. To date Lona and her team have placed about 300 students into in-service training opportunities, of which at least 85% obtained their qualifications and found employment.

In 2023 alone Kutsha managed to offer 32 new internship opportunities where 30 students took part in the mentor program and completed their qualifications; 26 got job opportunities while two students are furthering their studies.

May 2024 deliver 42 internships ...



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

for production managers

Looking back at the end of 2023, it is clear that Hortgro's leadership development programme for production managers not only improves leadership skills but it is creating a network of individuals capable of sharing knowledge and experiences.

The programme is aimed at production managers and has been developed when Hortgro engaged the services of Mazars to provide talent management services to our industry in close collaboration with industry stakeholders and augmented with funds from the Agriseta. This unique development programme not only focuses on general leadership skills but gives candidates the opportunity to learn about their own leadership style, their characteristics, and identifies their own development areas in order to improve their skills and the leadership approach.

The programme is two-phased with phase one focussing on psychometrics and individual development plans and phase two covering the different leadership training modules. The modules include: leading self, emotional intelligence, relationship strategies, problem solving skills, performance improvement, change management, diversity management and more.

Co-Hort 6, the sixth group to complete

the programme since it's development in 2019, recently completed their training and celebrated their achievements with an intimate ceremony at Krabbefontein in Grabouw. The ceremony was attended by the candidates, their line managers and other senior managers from their respective employers.

A total of 104 production-level leaders completed this competency programme with more organisations nominating their productions managers to participate. The programme is supported by SA Wine and the South African Table Grape Industry who have seen the impact of the training on production and the individual. Both have sent production managers from their respective industries on the programme.

Investing in people builds trust, confidence, loyalty and leads to improved production. As Andries Erwee from Monteith Trust in Grabouw states: "This training programme changes lives, and it is clearly visible when the managers return to the workplace.



It is undeniable that 2023 was a good year. May 2024 go one better.

Ayabonga and the singing soccer team



Although Ayabonga Mhobo was already singing in the pre-school choir at the age of five, it was Ms Thamba, the music teacher and choir conductor, who discovered his real talent in grade five. Not only did he sing in the junior choir then, but he was also chosen to perform a solo. To top that, he was also, later in the same year, a soloist for the senior choir. "That's where it all started," Ayabonga remembers with a happy little smile in his velvet voice.

In 2010 he was playing SA trails in black-ball pool in the Graceland Casino in Secunda, Mpumalanga. The same night, however, was also karaoke night. "So, I gave it a go and sang 'You raise me up'. When the song ended, I saw everybody left the slot machines and was standing right in front of me. It was magical," he says with that same happy smile. After that he became the musical director at NorSA, a community care organisation in Wellington that was co-founded between Norway and SA. He was teaching the kids to sing and play marimba and djembe drums as therapy.

Ayabonga has done some amazing stuff, but probably his best story was in 2013 when a girls' soccer team from NorSA was invited to play in the Norway School's Cup. Apart from the soccer tournament, there was going to be a host of other performances, singing and much more at this festive show. Part of the invite to

NorSA was that they also had to bring their choir to the event. There was one problem, though.

The budget could not stretch to take both the team and the choir along. No problem said Ayabonga. "Let's only take the soccer team, I'll turn them into a choir in time," says that happy little smile. And so, he did. Standing ovations was proof that he reached his ... well, goal.

Working at Nomnandi farm near Wellington in 2014 provided the opportunity for him to enter his first real music talent competition. He became the undisputed first winner of AGT which gave his musical career a major boost. Famous Dutch singer Jeroen van der Boom invited him to the Netherlands where they sang "You raise me up" together at a concert. "After that I was invited back to the Netherlands in December 2014, and yet again in April 2015!"

In 2016 he enrolled at the Frank Pietersen Music Centre in Paarl for additional voice training, to get even better. Arno Jones became his voice coach and pianist. This culminated in an opera concert at the centre with Ayabonga performing pieces by Mozart as well as Puccini's *La Bohème*. He also performed with pop star Nádine at the Cape Sun. Amongst others.

Ayabonga also believes that he must share his God-given musical talents.



That is why he is teaching the kids with special needs at Ligstraal School in Paarl to play the marimba. "I am hoping to get my own marimbas so I can teach more people, giving back to the community. I have also started my jazz and gospel band. We're a four-piece. Lead, drums, keyboard, and myself on bass. We will be playing in Khayelitsha end of the month, also with the Ligstraal marimbas in Cape Town. As the first ever winner of AGT, he was part of the AGT road show earlier this year and later at the gala concert in Paarl. It seems, no matter where his music takes him, he always comes back to AGT.

Another passion of Ayabonga is playing blackball pool. "I got exposed to pool in the bars in Mbekweni Township where I grew up and still live. At first, I didn't know any rules, I just started doing what the others were doing," he explains, yet again with that same happy smile. A contradiction? Well, the logic of music is mathematical and surely so is the structure of pool. It makes sense. Be that as it may, he has won many medals and national colours.

Apart from opera, marimba, djembe, the band, pool, writing poetry and lyrics, Ayabonga is also a pastor with Winners House of Prayers Ministry. It seems that this man can do most everything. Except maybe coaching soccer.

USA



I went

I saw

I am in awe

Mariette Kotzé, reflecting on the Big, Bigger, Biggest Apple.

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Reflecting on my recent trip to Washington and New York State in the USA, I realise that there is a reason why the Americans think (and say) everything is bigger and better in the USA. Probably because it is!

The trip started in Wenatchee, Washington also known as the “Apple capital of the world”. We were privileged to meet with industry organisations (Washington Apple Commission), top producing grower and marketing groups, packhouses and cooling facilities as well as researchers and research institutions.

Some interesting facts about the Washington apple industry in comparison to our own industry:

	APPLES	
	WASHINGTON, USA	SOUTH AFRICA
NUMBER OF HECTARES PLANTED	65 500	25 438
NUMBER OF CARTONS PRODUCED (12,5 KG EQUIV): FRESH MARKET (DOMESTIC AND EXPORTS)	187, 2 million	68, 7 million
EXPORT %	22 - 25%	42%
BIGGEST EXPORT MARKETS	Mexico and Canada	Far East and Africa
PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION OF APPLES (KG/PERSON/ ANNUM)	7,26	4,83

Some of my personal key take-home messages:

1. Small number of large (to very large) growers/grower groupings that is vertically integrated into the supply and value chain. This is similar to the South African context where 70% of apples is produced by 30% of the growers. Many of the Washington farms were previously family owned businesses, however recently significant investments were made by equity investors changing the ownership landscape. The consolidation in the industry is not only on a primary and secondary level, but is also evident on the marketing side, characterised by a small number of marketing operators with a large volume of fruit to be able to service the market all year round, and the ability to better control retailer space.
2. Horizontal expansion of the industry with an emphasis on diversification of the cultivars produced with proprietary varieties such as Honey Crisp, Cosmic Crisp, Ambrosia, Sugar Bee, Evercrisp, Rockit, Juici to name but a few. A key theme with new varieties is eating quality – crispy and juicy fruit.
3. There is no silver bullet in terms of the use of rootstocks, each rootstock used is different and needs to be managed accordingly. The general trend though was towards Geneva rootstocks such as G-41/G969 – both dwarfing and precocious. Rootstock selection remained a key consideration and determines to a large degree how the tree performs (grows), resistance to diseases such as fire blight, fruit size, storage ability (some tend to be more prone to bitter pit) of fruit linking in to marketing/distribution.
4. The USA has a big focus on the organic production of apples – a category that is gradually growing (almost 10% of the total production area is dedicated to organic production representing almost 12% of fresh fruit sold in the US). A must-have category in the marketing mix. The organic production is supported by very favourable local growing conditions with deep, fertile soils, ample water from the Columbia River, conducive climatic conditions (very cold weather) with no fruit fly!
5. Producer margins (profitability) are under pressure due to rising input costs, especially labour costs and economic pressures faced by US consumers. The minimum wage rate in the USA/hour are close to 13 times higher than the South African equivalent, although the Wenatchee production region boasts the cheapest electricity in Washington state.
6. The availability of labour is a big challenge as they mainly use people from Mexico and Jamaica under the H2A foreign worker programme which is a very strict and costly programme that needs to be complied with, hence productivity is essential in ensuring you get more bang for your buck.
7. Collaborative networks with key people, companies and institutions are vital and do add value through the sharing of knowledge and experience and the identification and leveraging of opportunities.

Being able to visit two of the major apple producing states in the USA (Washington state and New York state) was a great privilege and definitely brings a different perspective from production to marketing. It also brings the realisation that the South African apple producers, under very different and much more challenging circumstances, do not have to stand back to some of the leading apple producers in the world. That being said, there are still a lot for our industry to consider and through an attitude of continuous learning, we can become even better. And bigger.



Find updated information, research and advice for deciduous fruit farming in these resources:

Fresh Quarterly December Issue 23

**Fresh Notes 210 MRL Notification-Version 3-
December 2023-All Deciduous**

Timely Hints December 2023