



**HORTGRO**

# New Roots

an industry in transition

**Volume 6 - August 2024**

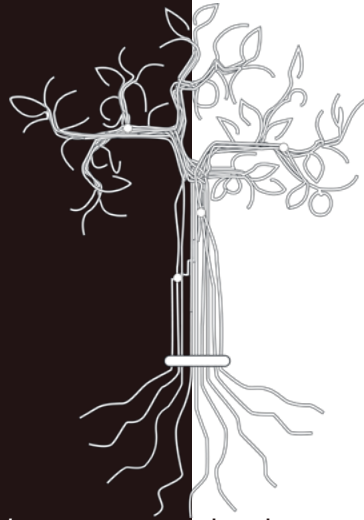
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# The Root Map

Foreword by Nitasha Baijnath-Pillay

Manager: Resource Management and Sustainability



In the previous issues of *New Roots*, we began navigating the journey that is ahead of us and Hortgro's role in facilitating meaningful progress and impact. We know that in an ever-changing environmental and socio-economic landscape, remaining tenacious, and being competitive at the same time, is not a walk in the park.

**Recent droughts and floods have intruded many parts of South Africa. We are now experiencing higher winter temperatures in the Western Cape than ever before. Climate change is not a new phenomenon. Plant and animal species have been adapting to climate change for millennia. Perhaps, we are not ready for the pace at which it is coming along to engulf us.**

As new and emerging producers in this industry, we need to find resourceful ways

to stop and reduce the risks of climate to change and to focus on ways to deal with the effects of climate change. Let's start by thinking globally and acting locally, which simply means that instead of waiting for grand breakthroughs to "fix the world," we should implement environmentally conscious solutions into everyday decisions and actions, no matter how small they may initially seem to be. As we focus on ways to navigate the decades ahead, we must prepare ourselves to do something now. We must include sustainability in every aspect of our value chain.

Hortgro is committed to jointly develop solutions and partnerships needed to improve opportunities for producers on the ground. Hortgro recently developed a Climate Change Response Strategy for the Deciduous Fruit Industry and is currently undertaking a Water Strategy for the industry. These will guide us in implementing relevant, appropriate, and vital actions to tackle climate change impacts on fruit production and all of its associated threats which inflate our production costs.

Simple interventions such as tracking your greenhouse gas emissions (carbon leakage) across operations and supply chains, monitoring and reducing waste, and assessing your water use are all ways to understand your carbon footprint and where you can save costs by being more resource-efficient.

In this Fourth Industrial Revolution, we must find ways to include smart technology on our farms. By opening up new exciting opportunities to include modern, smart solutions into the practice of

farming, more of our youth will become interested in the field due to their knowledge and appeal to technology.

I am most excited about the seeds of success and the invincible thread of tenacity and determination that runs through each story in this issue. The one unmistakable asset in every step of our sustainability journey, is you. Sustainability depends on your tenacity – on your ability to continue to exist, no matter what.

**Let's do something, now.**



As an environmental specialist Nitasha has served the Western Cape and the National Environmental Departments over the past 20 years. Before joining Hortgro as Resource Management and Sustainability Manager in April, she has been developing and implementing plans facilitating growth in the Oceans/Blue Economy Sector of South Africa. Now she is looking forward to make an indelible contribution to the Deciduous Fruit Industry of South Africa.

# Hortgro at the SA PALS Symposium in Mpumalanga

**As an industry Hortgro has embarked on this journey since 2002 with many lessons learnt along the way. Lessons that led to action. More recently, this includes formalising partnerships with, amongst others, PALS**

Long before sunrise on the morning of 13 June Mariette Kotzé and Cynthia Mahlathi was on their way to Cape Town International airport to catch a plane. Although it was still dark, their destination was the “Place of the Rising Sun”. More specifically, they were invited to represent Hortgro at the SA PALS Responsible Leadership Symposium in White River the next day. The easy way would have been to fly directly to Nelspruit, but the better way was to fly to Oliver Tambo and drive in a rental

to White River. This allowed them to visit Vusi Khanyile’s Afrikan Farms along the way, located on the Mpumalanga Highveld, about 30 kilometres from the town Amersfoort, in the Pixley ka Iseme municipality. Hortgro and Afrikan Farms have been involved for many years, and the opportunity to visit couldn’t be missed.

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” Mariette began their presentation the next morning. More simply put, it refers to synergy or T.E.A.M. An acronym for Together Everyone Achieves More.

This briefly describes the Hortgro philosophy in tackling complex industry matters such as economic development where TEAMwork with like-minded partners such as PALS, the Jobs Fund, funding partners such as



Nedbank and Hortfin and most importantly the individual agripreneurs is required for inclusive growth and sustainable economic development.

Inclusivity is not just merely taking from the haves and giving it to the have-nots, it's about transforming and empowering people throughout the value chain to actively participate in the commercial pome- and stone-fruit industries, its about creating generational wealth, its about ownership and management control and the transfer of knowledge and skills that will ultimately result in sustainable commercial businesses and sustained growth.

As an industry Hortgro has embarked on this journey since 2002 with many lessons learnt along the way. Lessons that led to action. More recently, this includes formalising partnerships with, amongst others, PALS to assist the industry to collaboratively and collectively implement a unique approach to economic development that is guided by a framework, tailored to each business' needs, supported through accessing

funding and addressing capacity building gaps. This team has already worked on a number of business projects that have demonstrated positive results that could be used to measure the impact of the collaborative approach and provide a platform for learning and improving.

**“Achieving inclusive growth involves multiple strategies and together we need to keep advancing supportive policies and fostering collaboration with the government and private sector,”  
Cynthia elaborated.**

“There are no quick fixes, it's a long process that requires adaptive strategies. Let's work together to build a more inclusive and sustainable agricultural future. We look forward to building a thriving, inclusive industry with PALS and expanding on strategic partnerships,”  
Mariette concluded.



# Asiphe Liza is all heart, head and hands

Asiphe graduated from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology where she studied agricultural management and is currently doing her second internship year at Bronaar farm in the Koue Bokkeveld. She was placed at Bronaar by Lona Odendaal who helps agricultural students find a good fit for the work placement year that is required for their studies. It looks like this is a very good fit for both Asiphe and Bronaar.

At Bronaar they emphasise employee development including developing leadership and participating in mentorship initiatives, like the internship and mentoring programme provided by Hortgro that Asiphe is taking part in.

Succession in agriculture is a hot topic, farms with a transformational and community mind-set do well to take it seriously. Bronaar is one of those farms. They understand and work practically to equip up-and-coming agricultural

**Originally from Lusikisiki, in the Eastern Cape, Asiphe is a sharp young woman with the ability to turn waste into gold.**



workers and leaders to navigate our country's growing future and Asiphe is definitely one to keep an eye on. She is not only traversing the cultural and geographical shift from growing up in the Eastern Cape to working on a farm in the Koue Bokkeveld, but also caring for different communities and the environment.

Sustainability extends beyond knowledge and skills capital for both Bronaar and Asiphe. She is an active member of the Bronaar recycling committee. Her clever hands just can't seem to keep still and have been busy reusing and recycling whatever and wherever since she was a child. Now, along with other handcrafts such as sewing and beadwork, she designs and upcycles objects from farm waste like aprons and caps created out of used fertilizer

bags. Steyn Marais, Bronaar farm manager, acts as a mentor for Asiphe in her journey.

Her creative and practical talents were identified at an early age. Her grandmother, Dorah Yekeleni Mkutshwa, saw that she was always busy making things and working with her hands. When Asiphe was in high school her grandmother decided that she should learn to sew and own her own sewing machine. She made a down payment on a machine and Asiphe learned to sew. Sadly, at the start of Covid, her grandmother passed away and the machine had yet not been paid off. This did not stop Asiphe who saved and worked until she owned the machine in full. She decided that the machine should stay in the Eastern Cape where she can work on it when at home. She doesn't want it to get damaged on her travels.

The story of the sewing machine doesn't end there, and it carries with it her grandmother's influence in caring for others. When Asiphe learned to sew she was surrounded by her grandmother and her grandmother's friends who believed in uplifting those around them. They believed in working with and helping others for free, to teach skills without payment.

Asiphe brought this positive attitude with her to Bronaar. As part of the mentorship programme the interns take part in the Brightstar programme. This programme offers the participants different tools to develop life skills that, among other things,



give them the advantage of self-reflection and building resilience to know themselves and their strengths and values. When asked what she wanted to work on for herself next, Asiphe answered that she is going to buy herself another sewing machine to use when she is at Bronaar.

She worked overtime during the harvest season until she saved enough to buy it. Now she uses her new machine in her upcycling designs and

to fix clothes of school children in the community.

Young leaders such as Asiphe who understand how to work with heart, head and hands are invaluable to the agricultural sector. They are stakeholders that can work with what is around them, see the use and find solutions in what others might overlook and strategically integrate the land, the people and commodities to create a harmonious whole.

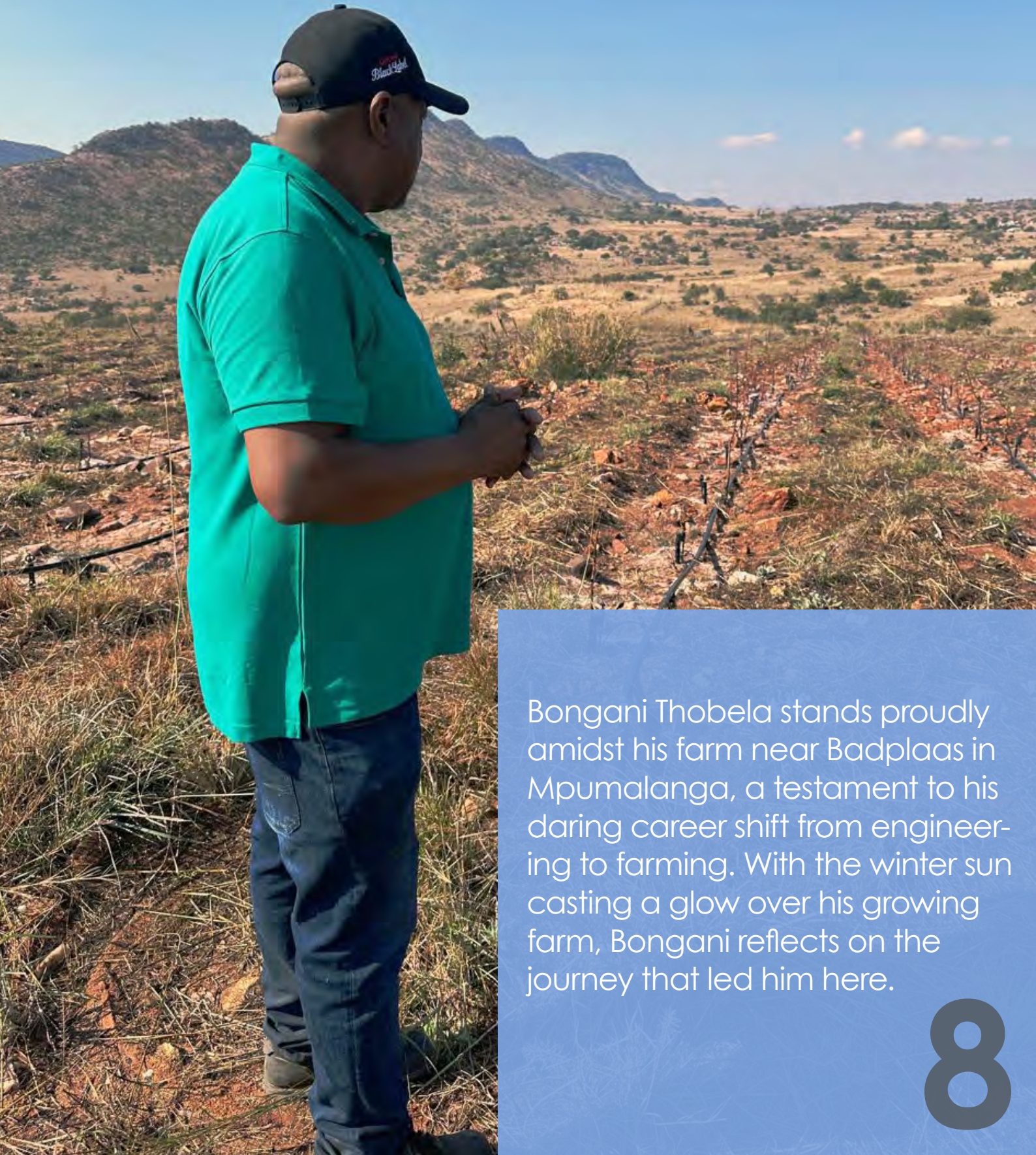
*“What is important for me is the motivation factor and the facial expression when you are helping someone. I remember the time that my grandmother accompanied me to her friends house. She used to sit next to me when I am sewing and then she would smile. That was motivating for me, that she would sit there and use her time until we would go back home.”*

**-Asiphe Liza**





# A journey from engineering to stone-fruit farming



Bongani Thobela stands proudly amidst his farm near Badplaas in Mpumalanga, a testament to his daring career shift from engineering to farming. With the winter sun casting a glow over his growing farm, Bongani reflects on the journey that led him here.

For years, Bongani excelled as an industrial engineer, working on numerous projects that showcased his skills and dedication. With a National Diploma and a B-Tech Degree in Industrial Engineering, as well as a as well as his ongoing Masters of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Johannesburg and vast experience in risk management, Bongani went on to build a robust career in risk management and corporate governance. He worked at South African Breweries in quality control, followed by roles in production management at Sasol Natro. He then served as a SHEQ Manager at Rand Air South Africa, a division of Atlas Copco.

Despite his successes, he felt a persistent longing for a different kind of fulfilment. Farming.

Bongani initially farmed part-time, managing Thobela Royale Investments, trading as Thobela Farm, while maintaining his full-time engineering job. However, a devastating veld fire that damaged his farm was the wake-up call. “When my farm suffered significant damage from the fires, I realised that I needed to be on the ground to manage risks and ensure its success,” he recalls. In January 2023, he made the bold decision to leave his engineering job and embrace farming full-time.

The transition was not without its challenges. “The first step was acquiring more knowledge about stone-fruit farming. I attended several agricultural training programs and sought advice from experienced farmers to prepare for my new venture,” he explains.

Today, Bongani’s typical day starts at dawn and ends well past sunset. “Farming is demanding, but incredibly rewarding,” he says. His engineering background has proved invaluable, allowing him to implement efficient irrigation systems and sustainable farming practices.

Yet, Bongani's motivation for farming goes beyond personal interest. He aims to contribute to the sustainability and productivity of the stone-fruit industry in Mpumalanga. He employs several workers, contributing to job creation and local economic development. His future goals include expanding his farm, incorporating more sustainable practices, and possibly venturing into agro-processing to add value to his produce. Bongani's commitment to farming has had a positive impact on the local community.

Bongani has faced numerous hurdles, from unpredictable weather patterns to financial constraints. "Farming requires resilience. There were times when I doubted my decision, but seeing the fruits of my labour kept me going," he shares. The satisfaction of producing high-quality stone fruit and contributing to the local community has been a significant reward.

Looking ahead, Bongani has ambitious plans for his farm. He aims to expand his orchard and introduce innovative farming techniques to boost productivity.

"I want to create a model farm that combines traditional practices with modern technology," he says.

Bongani also plans to mentor other emerging farmers, sharing his knowledge and experiences to help them succeed.

Bongani's journey from engineering to farming is a story of courage, passion, and resilience. It has transformed his life. Bongani's story serves as inspiration to all who dream of forging a new path. "Follow your passion tenaciously and be prepared to work hard. The rewards are worth it," he advises.



# Hortgro transformation award: **Witzenberg PALS** (Partners in Agri Land Solutions)

At this year's Hortgro Gala Awards Presentation, Hortgro deviated somewhat from the previous years when it came to the transformation award by not awarding it to an individual but a project. The reason for this is that it is a project that solely exists to make transformation in agriculture happen successfully.

PALS is a private land reform and development initiative established in 2015 in the Witzenberg (Ceres) area by white and black farmers in partnership with local communities and all three spheres of government (district, provincial and national). Having originated in Witzenberg, PALS is truly embedded in deciduous fruit farming transformation.



Milan Mogashoa, Adri Fourie, Reinette van Staden,  
Gerrit van Vuuren, Caitlyn Abdoll, Heinrich Jantjies, Werner du Toit (FNB)

PALS aims to create an enabling environment and thereby implement innovative land reform and inclusive agricultural growth that is in line with the Constitution and the National Development Plan.

The PALS initiative is based on sound business principles, solid legal structures, mentoring and training emerging black producers and agripreneurs to become successful business owners while addressing issues of sustainability, mistrust, unequal relationships and exit strategies. Therefore, focus is not only on economic levers for change but also include socio-economic aspects, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to land reform and inclusive agricultural growth and development. Taking on this enormous challenge is a true example of tenacity and determination. No matter what bureaucratic stumbling blocks and

other challenges they have to face, they never say never.

Through this, PALS has succeeded in carrying out several projects, not only in the stone- and pome-fruit sector but also in other agricultural enterprises. Some of the pome- and stone-fruit industry successes include Eyethu Intaba, Kaja Farming, Thembelitsha Farming, Dwarsberg Farming, Bambisane, TSR Farming, La Vouere and KLP Agri to name but a few.

PALS initiatives have a lasting and far-reaching impact on the individuals and businesses established and clearly demonstrate their commitment to sustainable agricultural development. Being involved with more than 50 effective private land redistribution enterprises with substantial black shareholding, helping many new-era farmers succeed, makes PALS a worthy recipient of this award.

# Hortgro Awards 2024

“The award was a gratifying and humbling recognition to PALS by our most valuable commodity partner who also understands and embraces the principles of ‘skin in the game’ and reciprocity.”

- Gerrit van Vuuren and Team PALS

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# Agri's Got Talent releases album

Agri's Got Talent (AGT) alumni and sponsors gathered for the launch of the album *A Decade of Music – Celebrating 10 Years of Agri's Got Talent* in Paarl, on 5 July. The album's release marked a significant milestone in the AGT project, a unique initiative that has showcased the incredible talent of agricultural workers across the country.

The live recordings from the AGT 10 Year Reunion Show, hosted in November 2023, was captured on the album. The Reunion Show brought together a diverse array of past winners and standout performers to honour 10 years of musical excellence and community spirit. The album focused primarily on previous AGT winners.



From left to right: Franco Williams (WCDoA), Thea van Zyl (Project manager), Victor Fredericks, Jasmine Bones, Francois van der Merwe, Mbulelo Sikade, Neville Fortuin, Armando Baartman, Magdalene Philander, Josephine Karelse, Ayabonga Mhobo, Faith Nogemane, Raylene Pypers, Roshdene Sampson, Elton Botes, Jenny Maarman, Frieda van den Heever, Astrid Arendse (Hortgro), Jacqueline Pandaram (WCDoA), Lindy Sigonyela (Hortgro)

- “Pata Pata” by Mbulelo Sikade (Winner 2017)
- “It’s All Coming Back to Me Now” by Jasmine Bones (Winner 2022)
- “Versace on the Floor” by Armando Baartman (Winner 2015)
- “Perfect” by Victor Fredericks, Elton Botes, Neville Fortuin, Ayabonga Mhobo
- “Hero” by Mariska Jaars (Winner 2018)
- “Mirror” by Roshdene Sampson (Winner 2020)
- “Weeping” by Ayabonga Mhobo (Winner 2014)
- “Stand Up for Love” by Faith Nogemane (Winner 2021)
- “Say Something” by Neville Fortuin (Winner 2016)
- “Rise Up” by Jenny Maarman, Ronel Radloff, Simone Abrahams, Josephine Karelse, Raylene Pypers, Magdalene Philander, Faith Nogemane.

Frieda van den Heever, celebrated artist and Agri’s Got Talent’s voice coach, has been the guiding force behind the project since its inception in 2014. Her dedication and expertise have been instrumental in shaping the voices of the many talented individuals who have graced the AGT stage.

Anton Rabe, Hortgro’s Managing Director, remarked, “Agri’s Got Talent is empowerment and people development in action. Listen and enjoy. Agriculture is about people, and this album is the result of talented and dedicated people that just needed a platform to showcase their incredible talents.”

*A Decade of Music – Celebrating 10 Years of Agri’s Got Talent* is now available to stream on Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube. The album is a testament to the transformative power of music and the lasting impact of AGT in the hearts and lives of agricultural workers and their communities.

To enter WhatsApp a sound clip of no longer than three minutes to 082 372 1557 or e-mail to [info@agrisgottalent.com](mailto:info@agrisgottalent.com)

**INCLUDE:**

- Name and surname
- Date of birth
- Your own cell phone number

- Name of farm / cellar / pack house
- Job description
- How long you have been working on the farm, in the pack house or cellar
- Nearest town
- Supervisor name and cell phone number



# A Decade of Music –

Celebrating 10 Years of Agri's Got Talent is now available to stream on Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube.



# A DECADE OF MUSIC

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF AGRI'S GOT TALENT



PRESENTED BY



Join the AGT community and find the latest news and action on Facebook [www.facebook.com/agriscottalent](http://www.facebook.com/agriscottalent) or visit [www.agriscottalent.com](http://www.agriscottalent.com). For more info contact Thea van Zyl at [info@agriscottalent.com](mailto:info@agriscottalent.com) or call 083 642 5342.

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

## Fresh Quarterly #25 June issue



## Fresh Notes

**Timely hints**  
for monthly advice on fruit production

**TIMELY**  
*hints*

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