



**HORTGRO**  
Growing Fruit IQ



**New Roots**  
an industry in transition  
Volume 7 - October 2024

- 1 The Root Map  
- Foreword
- 3 Reflecting on Hortgro's  
Economic Development
- 4 Empowerment projects  
is not a one size fits all
- 9 Fostering future leaders in  
the deciduous fruit industry
- 12 From rootstock to blossoms
- 14 One success  
outshines 20 failures
- 16 Chester Fisch  
wins AGT 2024
- 20 PALS turns 10
- 21 Technical Roots



# The Root Map

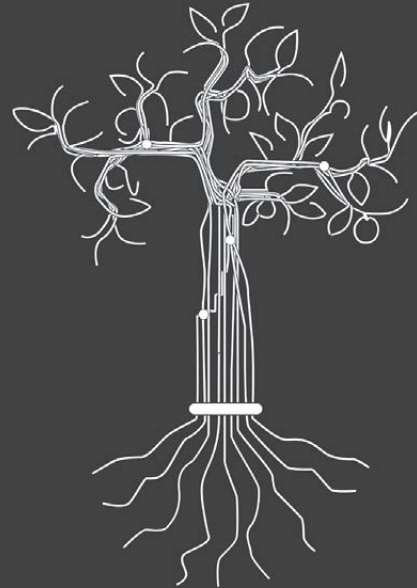
## Mentorship in action

Foreword by Hugh Campbell,  
Management Consultant  
Hortgro Economic Development

Hugh Campbell has 44 years of experience in the agricultural and fruit industry and production, both locally and abroad, and has a great interest in people and enjoys sharing his accumulated knowledge and experience.

Mentoring takes place when an experienced advisor guides and supports a less experienced mentee, nurturing their personal and professional growth through knowledge sharing and guidance. It requires a mentor who has an in-depth understanding of the relevant business environment who is able to listen, stimulate and challenge the mentees thinking while providing guidance, advice and support without making the decisions for the mentee. The mentor must be able to articulate advice and experience in ways that are easily understood by the mentee.

No person is an island, and no person has all the skills required to run all aspects of a business on their own.



Most commercial growers utilise various forms of technical advisors to assist them with the technical aspect of the farming business. In most cases on family-owned farms, formal and informal mentorship takes place between the parent and son/daughter who is taking over the farm, covering all aspects of the farming business. In the case of corporate farming businesses, a clear succession plan is usually in place to ensure that whoever is taking over the business has the necessary skills to run the business.

An interesting analysis was conducted by the presenter of the TV series "Megaboer" or Mega-farmer that ran a number of years ago.

One of the questions that was asked of these farmers was the following: “What was one of the critical aspects of your business that transformed your business from a family business into a mega business?” One of the key factors was when they decided to appoint outside directors onto their family boards – people who understood different aspects of business and who brought in a completely different skills-set to that which existed within the family. People who asked critical questions and who provided strategic direction.

There is therefore ample evidence that a huge benefit can be accrued

to any new entrant into deciduous farming by partnering them up with the right mentor who can advise, guide and support them on their journey to becoming successful growers. The diversity of deciduous farming makes it an interesting and challenging environment. But it requires a broad knowledge and a lot of skill to successfully navigate the nuances of fruit farming. It takes time to develop these skills – often skills and exposure that one is not even aware of.

A mentor can assist in fast tracking your development ... if you let them!



# Reflecting on Hortgro's Economic Development

"At the end of every working day, I try to sit back and have a moment of reflection," says the Manager of Hortgro's Economic Development, Cynthia Mahlathi. That's when she looks at all her interactions, what was good and more importantly what could have been done better. In the latter case, she will find a certain moment to go back to that situation or person(s) and indeed improve on it.

**"There is always an opportunity to learn, to do better. Because nothing is ever 100%".**

The first year of the Economic Development (ED) went by very fast she says as she remembers how eager and energetic she was, believing she was ready for all the challenges she saw.



"I can't say I got all the way to where I wanted to so far with ED, but overall I did hit the ground running and had to learn as we went along. But the eagerness and energy is still there. I also respect what has already been done and didn't want to come in with a new broom sweeps cleaner attitude."

It was a case of finding out how to go from here to there and to learn what producers out there expect and need.

**"What I think transformation is, what other people think it is and what it in reality is, is never really the same thing."**

She had to find common ground, creating a unified and inclusive group. She believes they have made progress. "But success is a relative and objective concept," she will remind you, smiling.

Apart from getting to grips with what has been done, and how it was done she wanted to expand. And she did that through the capacity building program. The ED wrote a proposal to the Jobs Fund, looking into putting a formal program together contracting experts to offer new-era farmers access to resources such as technical support and consultancy, be it legal or institutionally as well as financial literacy and general management, focusing on upskilling their capacities.

With her efforts capacity building went from an ad hoc basis to a

structured and measurable program creating empowerment in terms of knowledge, resources and network. It is no use having a farm without the broad spectrum knowledge of running it as a workable profitable business. The capacity building program is the portal to this transformation with access to a wide range of skilled mentors and coaches on all levels which the farmers need but cannot afford on their own. Now they have access to that knowledge, to such a degree that they might, after some time, be able to become mentors or coaches themselves for newer, younger farmers getting into the business.

Another key benefit of the program is that it creates networks. Every time a farmer connects with a new mentor or coach, he becomes part of another network. And the more networks, the more resources, knowledge and skills you acquire.

Asking Cynthia about what the ED's goal is for the next year she says: "The first thing is to wait for the results from the oncoming crop of the farms where we are involved at present. To see how well the capacity building is working. Then it is measureable. The longer term goal is to broaden the support services to more new-era pome and stone fruit farms all over South Africa.

**If not all of them, eventually."**

# Empowerment projects is not a one size fits all

Mariette Kotzé, General Manager,  
Industry Support Services (Hortgro)



A recent enquiry regarding how empowerment transactions actually work sparked this article with my first response being that it is not merely as simple as that. There are so many factors and variables to consider in response to this simple question and without getting into the nitty gritty one will not do it justice.

It can be very complex or quite simple depending on your individual exposure and/or understanding of business models, corporate and/or ownership structures. I reflect here on my own personal experiences gained over more than a decade and will try and provide a balanced perspective that will hopefully give insight and assist in highlighting key aspects to be addressed for future-proofing your business or possible new business venture.

The South African pome and stone fruit industry is a long-term crop, highly capital and management intensive, linked to high risks (and rewards). In

order to materialise and capitalise on investments made, requires careful planning and adherence to legal and regulatory frameworks. In the case of empowerment transactions it is even more important to make sure that the identified beneficiaries are included, informed and exposed throughout the process as that will result in understanding ownership and accountability. In other words empowerment, making sure that there is proper transfer of skills and knowledge. In most cases easier said than done because business models and ownership structures in itself are very technical, associated with plenty legal terminology and onerous contracts and agreements that provide the operating framework and legal responsibilities. There is no one size fits all approach and each business model and ownership structure is different.

The most common business models applied within the empowerment fraternity are:

5

### **Sole ownership or wholly black-owned enterprises where a farm or business in the fruit value chain have been acquired through:**

- Government grant funding for individuals or groups through programmes such as Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD), Pro-Active Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS), grants from various other Departments such as Department of Trade Industry and Competition (dtic).
- Privately acquired finance from own funds or through obtaining a loan from a commercial financier.
- Blended finance which consist of a combination of grant funding, commercial finance, industry contributions and own funding.

### **Equity ownership/joint venture is where designated shareholders acquires a percentage of the company's shares through:**

- a combination of debt from commercial financiers or shareholders equity (loans), and/or,
- other third-party funding such as government grants (mostly LRAD) not repayable and only accessible by Historically Disadvantaged Individuals (HDI's),
- blended finance in any case suggesting the blending of various financial funding and finance instruments to make the transaction more favourable. In many instances where Government bought the shares on behalf of the beneficiaries these

transactions was mostly structured into trusts holding the shareholding in the business. These transactions were typically characterized by large groups of people, however recent transactions were more focussed on identifying the right individuals with different ownership structures.

### **Trusts, Community Property Associations (CPA's) and cooperative models**

These are typically where ownership is transferred to a trust or cooperative that represents a broader group of beneficiaries such as employees or communities. These types of transactions are typically where farms and/or businesses were acquired by the State on behalf of the beneficiaries. Trusts can ensure community-wide benefits but need to be managed carefully to ensure that the real intentions are realised, whilst cooperatives provide other advantages of pooling resources, machinery and equipment and increased bargaining power especially in rural areas with resource poor farmers.

### **Employee share ownership**

Employee share ownerships are a structure where workers become part-owners of the company through shares allocated as part of their employment benefits.

The above seem simple enough right?! I am afraid not quite ...

Each of these business models has a company ownership structure that could once again consist of one or various company forms such as:

- Private company (Pty) Ltd – shareholders own the company and their liability is limited to their shares
- Joint venture – two or more companies collaborate on a specific project or venture
- Trust – where the trust owns and controls the company for the benefit of the beneficiaries
- Closed corporation (CC) – also known as private company with limited number of shareholders not publicly traded.

Typical examples of ownership structures in our industry consist of more than one ownership structure; for instance the shareholders in a company can be a private company, and/or a trust and/or a CC. Each ownership structure has its advantages and disadvantages and the choice of structure depends on various factors such as the objectives of the company, the goals, the industry and the company size.

So apart from the ownership structure, more important is understanding the roles and responsibilities linked to ownership and ensuring participation and management control.

(See following page for breakdown of company ownership structures roles and responsibilities)

In conclusion – the devil is in the detail. Ensure that all parties involved understand the legal and binding agreements as they are jointly or severally liable for the company. It is also good practise to annually review these agreements and ensure that everyone charged with oversight and management is aligned. During the appointment of a board of directors, trustees or company representatives, make sure that individuals are selected on merit and are able to act in the interest of the beneficiaries they are representing. An independent director/trustee is always a good idea as such a person only act in the best interest of the company and does not have any vested interest. Operationalise the structures and ensure that regular meetings does take place to keep people informed, decisions are made and that these are recorded – this safeguards all involved. Hortgro as the industry organisation can assist to unpack and understand in our efforts towards sustainable transformation and real empowerment.





Ownership structure: :  
**Private company (Pty) Ltd**

Roles: **Shareholders**

- Own the company
- Appoint the board of directors
- Provide funding/finance according to shareholding
- Receive dividends.

Roles: **Board of directors**

- Oversee company strategy
- Make major decisions
- Appoint executives to execute strategy
- Ensure legal and regulatory compliance
- Remain accountable to shareholders.

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Ownership structure:  
**Joint venture**

Roles and responsibilities are shared between partner companies

Roles: **Appoint board of directors/management committee**

- Oversees JV strategy
- Makes key decisions
- Resolves disputes.

Roles: **Appoint chairperson/CEO**

- Leads the JV and implement strategy
- Shared responsibilities in terms of strategy, decision making, risk management, financial management and compliance.

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Ownership structure:  
**Trust**

The trustee holds assets or property for the benefit of beneficiaries

Roles: **Grantor**

- Creates the trust and transfers the trust assets
- Defines the trust's purpose, terms and conditions (trust deed)
- May appoint initial trustees.

Roles: **Trustee**

- Holds legal title to trust assets
- Manages and administers the trust assets
- Makes decisions regarding investments and distributions
- Maintain accurate records and accounts
- Files tax returns and reports
- Acts in the interest of the beneficiary.

Roles: **Beneficiary**

- Receives benefits from the trust/asset
- May request information or distributions
- May have voting rights or approval authority.

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Ownership structure: :  
**Closed corporation**

Roles: **Shareholders**

- Own the corporation
- Elect the board of directors
- Receive dividends
- Have limited personal liability.

Roles: **Board of directors**

- Oversees strategy and direction
- Makes major decisions
- Appoint management/executives
- Monitors financial performance.



# Fostering future leaders in the deciduous fruit industry

Hortgro, has spent more than R55 million over the past decade on bursaries.

The Hortgro Bursary Programme (HBP) aims to support and nurture the next generation of industry leaders and researchers assisting talented and ambitious students pursuing careers relevant to the deciduous fruit industry, including agricultural sciences, horticulture, business management, and environmental sustainability. The programme aims to alleviate the financial burden of higher education, allowing recipients to focus on their studies and

contribute to the industry's growth and innovation.

“Investing in the future of our industry is crucial,” said Hortgro Executive Director, Anton Rabe. “By supporting students through our bursary programme, we are helping them achieve their educational goals and fostering a new generation of professionals who will bring fresh perspectives and expertise to the deciduous fruit sector. This initiative underscores Hortgro's commitment to advancing the sector and ensuring its long-term sustainability.”

Past and present Hortgro bursary beneficiaries with Astrid Arendse (Hortgro, Manager: Human Resources and Learning and Development)



Previous Hortgro bursary holder and PhD candidate, Ayesha Shaikh Abrahams, who completed her undergrad studies through Hortgro, shared her academic journey with fellow students. “Post-graduate studies are not for everyone, but persevering against all odds has taught me about myself. Don’t think about big pay cheques and fancy titles, the important thing is to do what you like and keep challenging yourself.”

Industry leader and the Hortgro OSH Reinecke Frontrunner for 2024, Pieter du Toit, said one of his beliefs is “continuous education and growth”.

Du Toit said that in life good business strategy is focusing internally and nurturing talent, and not being distracted by instability and political turmoil on the outside.

“South African agriculture found itself at an inflection point in 1997 with the deregulation of agriculture. I believe we are at another inflection point. The Fourth Industrial Revolution will fundamentally change agriculture. We must be ready to board that train, otherwise we will never catch it.”

He encouraged students to keep “at it” because the industry will need researchers and educated leaders to survive and grow. “Agriculture is a great place to be with many opportunities.”

The HBP offers a range of benefits, including full or partial coverage of tuition fees, a stipend for study-related expenses and opportunities for practical experience through internships and mentorships with leading industry professionals. Recipients will also gain access to Hortgro’s network of experts, providing them with valuable industry insights and connections that will enhance their career prospects.

Applications for the Hortgro Bursary Programme are open to South African students currently enrolled in or applying to undergraduate or postgraduate programs related to the deciduous fruit industry. The selection process is based on academic excellence, demonstrated passion for the industry, and potential for future contributions to the sector.

Through the Hortgro Bursary Programme, Hortgro is investing in the industry’s future and reinforcing its role as a global leader in deciduous fruit production, advancing the sector’s sustainability, innovation and global competitiveness.

For more information about the Hortgro Bursary Programme, please visit [www.hortgro.co.za](http://www.hortgro.co.za) or contact Astrid Arendse: at [astrid@hortgro.co.za](mailto:astrid@hortgro.co.za)

10

# Fast Facts about the HBP

**21**  
undergraduates  
@  
**R1.3m**

HBP currently boasts 21 undergraduate students at a cost of R1.3 million studying at SU, Elsenburg, CPUT, North-West University, CTU (Creative Technology Universitas) and the University of Cape Town.

Hortgro Science currently supports 32 post-graduate students at a cost of R3.4 million.

**32**  
post-graduates  
@  
**R3.4m**

**950**  
applicants  
for  
**2025**

For the 2025 HBP, more than 950 applications were received.

Some of the Hortgro bursary holders form part of the Hortgro Mentorship Programme. Currently, 36 students are placed in the following areas: Ceres, KBV, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Tulbagh, Wellington, Piketberg, Simondium, Porterville, Villiersdorp, and Avontuur.

**36**  
placements

# From rootstock to blossoms

Buhle Ngindi was born in Jamestown in the Eastern Cape, she matriculated at Plumstead High whereafter she moved on to Stellenbosch University, going through the ranks until she completed her Masters, cum laude, on comparative studies of apple rootstock with a well-deserved Hortgro prestige bursary.

“Part of the deal with Hortgro is to do a PhD which I really want to do yes, but not now. I need to get in the field first to see what awakens my interest.



**I eventually want to operate as a technical advisor, helping farmers with information and knowledge on how to improve their farming,”** she explains.

This realisation all started while at university, going on field trips where there would be a technical adviser on the one side as well as the farmer. “I don’t see myself as the farmer. I like teaching and I like working with people and most importantly I have a love for science. I like understanding the biology of trees and can see myself helping the farmer with that knowledge. ”

Yet, she believes that it is good to have hopes and dreams but also being open to change and that it is not bad if you change your mind. As long as your mind is open. So who knows, maybe she might become a farmer. Going forward is growing forward. And patience is a virtue with her, an

amazing plus for someone young and eager to make a difference. “There are many ways to get to the ultimate goal. I am still young and have many things to learn.” She reckons she might even go full circle and end up back at university, but this time as a lecturer, or in research. This definitely only after a reasonable time in the field, bringing the practical side of farming in close contact with the academical side of university.

At present she works as a project coordinator at Hortgro. “I am very privileged in this sense because it allows me to get to different farms, being exposed to different perspectives and probably the most crucial part is growing my network with mentors that help to teach and guide me. I want to know more and just more.”

**If you are in the deciduous fruit business, remember the name Buhle Ngindi. You’ll hear it again.**



# One success outshines 20 failures

**About seven or eight years ago, Thandi Sityodana and Akhona Mggweto, arrived at Sonlia Packhouse needing to complete an internship. They had walked some 9 km from Wellington to Sonlia and asked JC Müller, Sonlia CEO, if they could do their internship there. Moved by their determination, JC gave them a lift home and told them to start on Monday.**

These two women completed their year-long internship, which marked the beginning of Sonlia's internship program. Some years the program is funded by AgriSETA, and other times it's self-funded.

At first, JC took on two interns at a time, but as the packhouse expanded, he began taking two per packhouse. Gender didn't matter – though early on, only women participated. The internship starts with basic tasks, like sorting in the packhouse for a month or two. Thereafter they move on to packing alongside the workers. As the year progresses, interns learn to do quality checks, like testing sugar levels, and then join the quality control team. They also get hands-on experience with computer systems for intake



processes. By the time they finish their year, interns are familiar with all aspects of the packhouse procedure.

JC, or a line manager, helps the interns with assignments they have to complete during their year. Sometimes, these tasks require them to visit a farm. They are assisted by the farm manager at one of the Sonlia farms in Tulbagh for a day or two. At the end of the year, the interns receive their diplomas from Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). If they make the cut, which unfortunately doesn't always happen.

Whether the program receives funding or not, Sonlia continues to host work placements to help them build careers in the industry. JC hopes for more success stories and is happy to see a few already emerging. For instance, one male intern stayed for another year after graduating, going the extra mile, and now works at Sawmill Packhouse in Franschhoek.

Thembakazi Dyantyi is another success story. She didn't do her internship at Sonlia but completed her graduate placement there. After six years at the

packhouse, she now runs the night shift's quality control and is being groomed for a management role. Mongi Silimela, another standout, finished his internship last year and is currently a graduate placement. Although there's no funding for his role, his passion for computers and determination to learn makes him a crucial member of the night shift.

JC's passion is people. He loves working with them, watching them develop, and giving them the chance to grow. Sonlia's commitment extends to all its employees. The farm has partnered with Procure, which visits weekly to provide social welfare services and offer training for supervisors. Sonlia is also building a crèche and is training two staff members to run it. These team members go to Paarl for training one week each month, enjoying the opportunity, embracing the chance to receive further training.

JC acknowledges that there have been failures, but he believes one success story can make up for 20 failures.

There is always a good story in the end.

Thembakazi Dyantyi, JC Muller, Mongi Silimela





# Chester Fisch

# Wins

# AGT 2024

**With a rapt audience, Chester Fisch poured everything into his renditions of Michael Jackson's "The Way You Make Me Feel" and Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" (1964). He walked away with the Agri's Got Talent 2024 winner's trophy at this stellar occasion at Dawn Mountains, Simondium.**

It was not only Fisch's extraordinary vocal abilities that impressed the judges, his dancing skills and showmanship all contributed to his win. And the politically inspired "A Change is Gonna Come" – his second song – spoke poignantly to the heart and soul of South Africa's agricultural community.

Fisch, from Mountain Ridge, Wolseley, a seasonal worker in the wine industry, said in an interview with Food for Mzansi that he believed in the future of agriculture, "because the world was built on it, and the world cannot survive without it."



**“People need to eat and that is why farming is important. I want to contribute towards promoting agriculture, especially amongst the youth.”**

Beyond wine making, Fisch is equally passionate about music. By winning AGT 2024 he hopes to advance his music career and wants to help young artists grow and develop their talent.

He was encouraged by his partner, Felicity, to enter AGT. Although the gospel genre is his first love, Fisch also excels in R&B and pop. “I am versatile and would like to grow in all areas when it comes to music.”

For him, participating in AGT was not about winning, but learning and growing as an artist. “In every competition, there are no winners or losers. We are all learners,” he said.

Chantel Boonzaaier, from DGB (Ltd) Franschhoek, took second place, and Sandile Mathebula from Macdaring Farm, Mbombela, came third.

The AGT judges said the 2024 competition was the toughest one to date, with a very small scoring margin separating the first three contestants.

Lungelo Sithole, from KMI Farming in Mbombela, won the prize for the best singer in an indigenous language, awarded by the Afrikaans Language Council (Afrikaanse Taalraad/ATR). Her version of Zahara's emotional, Xa bendingena Mama, was a powerhouse performance second to none.



The lyrics, in isiXhosa, were a tribute to Zahara's mother who passed away.

Dr Conrad Steenkamp, CEO of the ATR said that AGT is a unique project that gives people from the agricultural sector a chance to sing in their mother tongue.

**"In South Africa we have several indigenous languages to be proud of, Afrikaans being one of them. We pass on our language to our children through singing. It is not just about Afrikaans, it is about encouraging and supporting the arts in the mother tongue."**

Thea van Zyl, AGT Project Coordinator, said the project is more than a singing competition, it is also about skills development – skills that the contestants take back to their homes, farms and communities. It is about building bridges and inspiring talented agricultural workers to reach for their dreams. Agri workers are the backbone of the fruit and wine industries. AGT gives these unsung heroes a platform to be heard."

AGT was started in 2013 by Hortgro, the South African deciduous fruit industry organisation. This was the 11th anniversary of the project, which is sponsored by Hortgro, Citrus Growers' Association, South African Table Grape Industry body, SA Wine, and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture. The project is also supported by Fruitfly Africa, BerriesZA and Culdevco.

**For more information, follow AGT on social media, visit [www.agrisgottalent.com](http://www.agrisgottalent.com), or contact Thea van Zyl at [info@agrisgottalent.com](mailto:info@agrisgottalent.com).**



**18**



# PALS turns ten

“Witzenberg PALS (Partners in Agri Land Solutions) is a non-profit company and public benefit organisation established in 2014, focused on effective land reform projects. Our philosophy is based on integrity, honesty, respect, trust, transparency, commitment and accountability. A formula that has been going from strength to strength,” says Gerrit van Vuuren, Legal and Strategic Advisor of PALS.

On 22 August PALS celebrated its 10th anniversary, now with many successful new-era farming projects. Projects implemented and listed are based on utilising the PALS framework in the establishment of new agri enterprises.

Hortgro sincerely congratulates PALS on their first 10 years of successful contribution to positive land reform in South Africa. May the next 10 years take transformation even further and beyond expectation.

# Technical Roots

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

## Fresh Quarterly #26 September issue



## FRESH NOTES

A TECHNICAL UPDATE PUBLISHED BY HORTGRO SCIENCE

Fresh notes

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

**TIMELY**  
*hints*

**Hortgro Footprint webinars**  
for information on sustainable practices,  
mitigations, and risks in the  
SA deciduous fruit industry

HORTGRO  
sustainability  
FOOTPRINT WEBINARS



**Learn more about the SWD  
(Spotted wing drosophila)**

[Fresh Notes May](#)

[Pamphlets and Guidelines](#)