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New Roots

an industry in transition

Volume 9 - July 2025



The Root Map

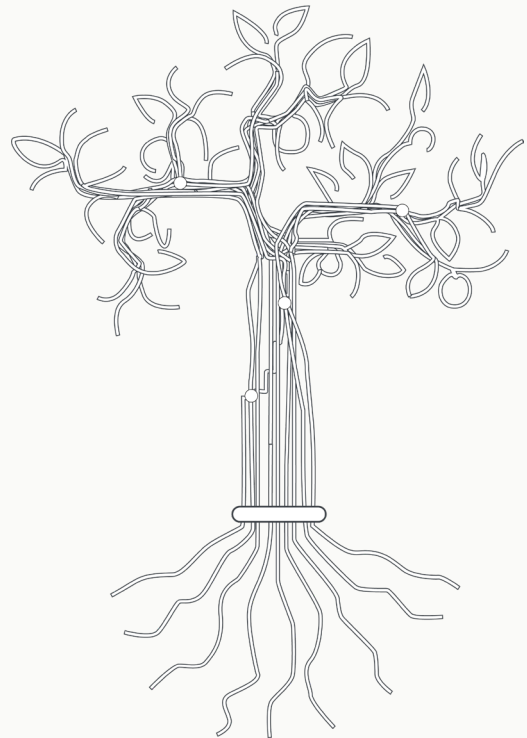
Focus on the real needs of emerging producers

Foreword by Anton Rabe,
Hortgro CEO

At Hortgro we believe we have a sound and proud record over +20 years of transforming our industry throughout the value chain in a meaningful, impactful and sustainable manner with a range of initiatives to empower beneficiaries of the various programmes both economically and with skills required to ensure optimal opportunities in our industry and the agri industry at large.

Hortgro has a well-established economic development/land reform programme under the able leadership of Mariette Kotze and Cynthia Mahlathi. The focus is on technical and business skills and management support to enable new entrant farmers to grow their businesses to full commercial status. The latest programme, the Hortgro Skills Accelerator Programme (HSAP) is also starting to show a marked difference and ensure focus on the real needs of our emerging producers.

This is for wholly-owned black entities and for beneficiaries of partnerships with commercial producers. The Western Cape Department of Agriculture and the Jobs Fund are key



partners to augment and gear the limited industry funds.

The next challenge is crossing the generation gap with first generation farmers passing a sustainable batten on to the next generation. Wealth is not created in one generation – it is created through effective succession and multiple generations.

Hortgro also has an effective Learning and Development (L&D) focus where a number of initiatives are rolled out in collaboration with experts and service providers in this space under the management and coordination of Astrid Arendse and Elouise van Zyl.

The L&D programmes focus on bursaries, under- and post graduate

and science linked programmes, work integrated learning (WIL), mentorships, internships and workplace/graduate placements, leadership development, management and technical skills, shop steward and health and safety training.

Various socio-economic activities such as gender-based violence (GBV) awareness training, substance abuse, effective parenting and related soft skills, industry tours (school/student/lecturers) and the well-known Agri's Got Talent (AGT) programme that is now running in its 12th year, further augment Hortgro's footprint in the CSI space.

Furthermore, Hortgro also participates in the development of various qualifications in partnership with some of the other fruit industries within the FruitSA umbrella. This includes qualifications for fresh produce packhouse line managers, packhouse supervisors and horticultural farm assistants and orchard and vineyard forepersons.

Hortgro will continue to invest time and resources into these programmes. One by one we will make a difference, but this will take time as this is a journey and a process with each individual or group. There are no silver bullets or a one size fits all approach in this space.



Balancing now and next:

Progress of Hortgro Economic Development initiatives

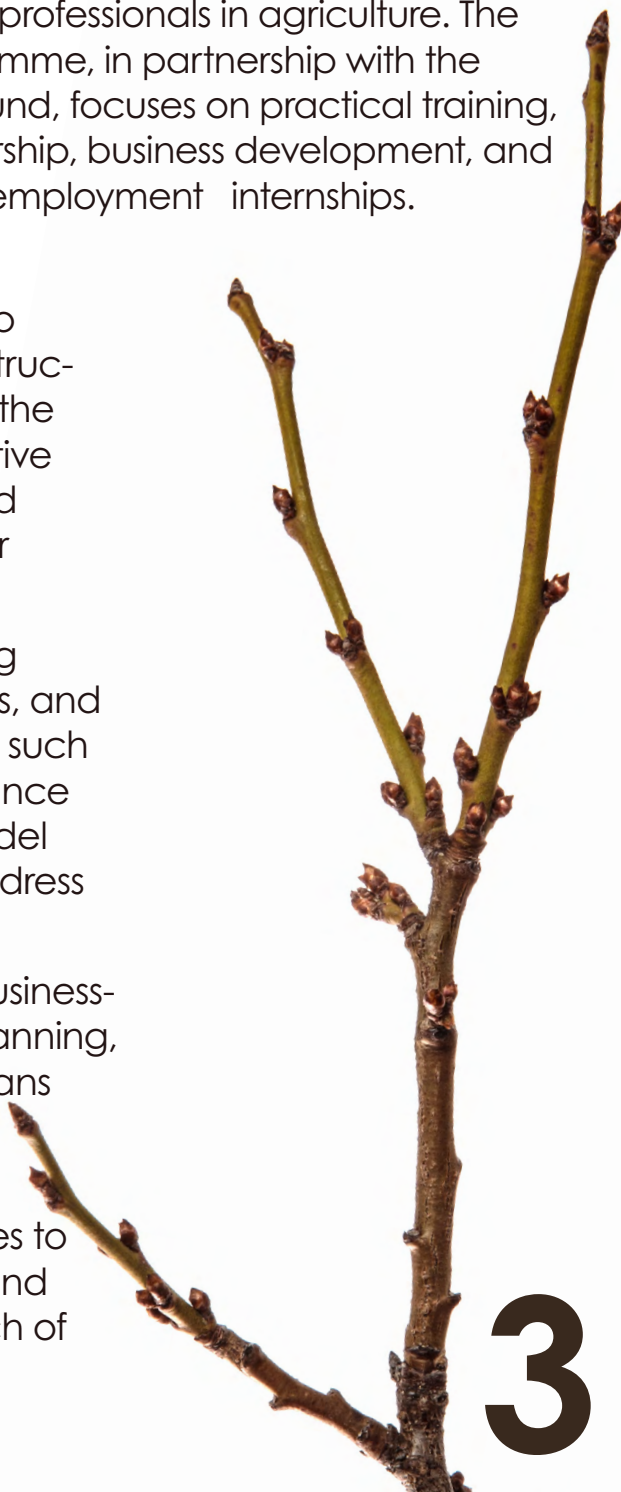
by Cynthia Mahlathi,
Hortgro Economic Development Manager

The journey of economic development through industry-led support programmes continues to deliver meaningful impact toward building a more inclusive pome- and stone-fruit sector. The focus remains on leveraging the surplus of incremental gains to meaningfully measure progress and long-term impact.

Progress highlights:

- **Internships and Youth Development:** Forty-two young graduates have been placed on farms for structured mentorship and workplace experience, with the majority already completing their internships. Creative partnerships and collaborations enabled continued placements through both public and private sector support.
- **Tailored Capacity Building:** All 27 participating farms have undergone in-depth needs assessments, and over 20 have received customised support in areas such as finance management, institutional and governance support and production practices. The training model matches various industry expertise with farms to address specific developmental priorities.
- **Business Support:** New and emerging farm businesses are receiving hands-on guidance to improve planning, operations, and readiness for financing. Business plans are being developed and aligned with funding opportunities.
- **Partnership Growth:** The programme continues to expand its network of technical experts, mentors, and strategic partners to enhance the quality and reach of support provided.

The Hortgro Skills Accelerator Programme, launched in mid-2024, continues to add value in strengthening the capabilities of first-generation producers and young professionals in agriculture. The programme, in partnership with the Jobs Fund, focuses on practical training, mentorship, business development, and youth employment internships.



Progress has also been made across a range of industry programmes and initiatives funded or supported in partnership with the Western Cape Department of Agriculture. These include the Orchard Establishment Project, the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP), the 50 Black Commercial Programme (BCP), and the Value Chain Financing Project (Hortfin).

In the 2024/5 cycle, 73% of CASP's fruit-project funding was directed towards short-term production inputs, with 9% allocated to infrastructure (such as cold storage and packing facilities) and 3% to alternative energy solutions. Similarly, 70% of BCP funding was used to support businesses in financial distress and provide production inputs and unlock other funding opportunities. In the context of Hortfin, of the total blended finance disbursed through Hortfin, only 21% was allocated to production finance, while a greater share of 35% was invested in orchard establishment, 27% in land purchases and refinancing, and 17% in movables like vehicles and equipment.

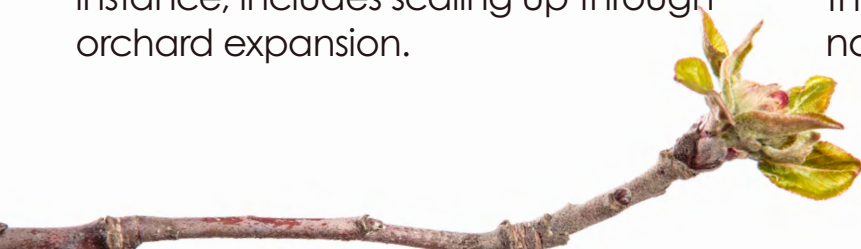
When one reviews the funding support and towards what it is targeted, it is indicative of heavy reliance on input support which is critical for immediate productivity, however, channelling the majority of the funding towards that kind of investment does not add value to the sustainability initiative which, for instance, includes scaling up through orchard expansion.

Long-term infrastructure investments such as orchard establishment, supporting bulk infrastructure and systems, and climate-resilient technologies are crucial for anchoring producers into competitive, export-oriented value chains. This requires a strategic approach that balances investment financing support for long-term productive assets, that drive long-term economic activity, resilience, and job creation, with short term production investments.

Projects such as the Orchard Establishment Initiative highlights the impact of long-term investment and requires substantial financial resources to scale and sustain. To date, over 1 490 ha have been established and/or re-planted.

Looking ahead, industry stakeholders, funders, and government partners have an opportunity to collaborate more intentionally around a balanced approach to funding. While input support remains essential and should be made more affordable it needs to be paired with investments in infrastructure and orchard development that deliver lasting, compounding benefits. Revisiting current funding frameworks will be key to ensure that economic development efforts provide both immediate relief and long-term, sustainable growth.

As we work together on our incremental gains in the fruit sector, it is critical that every rand spent contributes not just to survival but to sustainable



A photograph of Pieter du Toit, an older man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue baseball cap, a light blue long-sleeved shirt, and a high-visibility orange safety vest. He is standing in a large industrial warehouse, looking down at a metal railing. The warehouse is filled with stacks of cardboard boxes, some labeled 'DUTOIT', and various equipment. The lighting is bright, coming from overhead industrial lights.

Pearls of wisdom from Pieter du Toit

Insights for emerging farmers

While Pieter du Toit wraps up a notable career as Managing Director and now Chairman of the Dutoit Group, his lifelong passion for agriculture and commitment to excellence culminate in invaluable lessons for young and beginner farmers entering the agricultural community. Here are his key insights that underscore respect, passion, teamwork, and innovation.

1. Financial discipline is paramount

Pieter emphasizes that financial discipline is the backbone of any agricultural venture. “I refer to this as the back room of your business,” he states. Many failures in the agricultural sector result from inadequate financial structures and poor oversight. If your “back room” is unorganized, success in the “front room”, or visible operations, will be unattainable.

2. Cultivate passion for people and product

A deep-seated love for your team, products, and environment is critical. Pieter has observed that farmers who genuinely care and strive to make a positive difference tend to thrive, while those focused solely on profit often fall short. "Success follows those who have passion," he notes.

3. Clients are the drivers

Understanding market demands is essential. Pieter's golden rule is to "not produce that which you cannot sell". Staying attuned to customer preferences and exploring new trends help maintain excitement and relevance in the marketplace.

4. Embrace teamwork

Individual success in agriculture is limited. Building a supportive network is crucial, as the agricultural landscape can be unpredictable. Pieter urges new farmers to engage with industry structures and actively participate in their communities to weather the inevitable storms.

5. Foster a learning culture

Agriculture is about continuous improvement. "I recommend leveraging specialists to enhance knowledge and learning. If possible, travel to best practices around the world and be

open to sharing insights to foster collective growth," Pieter states.

6. Adapt to the Fourth Industrial Revolution

The agricultural sector is in a transformative phase marked by data-driven decision-making. Pieter stresses that success in this rapidly changing environment hinges on embracing cutting-edge innovations. "If you fall behind now, you may never catch up," he warns.

7. Work with nature's laws

Lastly, Pieter highlights the importance of competitive advantages that acknowledge and respect nature's laws. Sustainable farming practices, including a commitment to preserving soil and water, are essential for long-term success.

Emerging farmers integrating these principles can lay a strong foundation for a prosperous future in agriculture.

"In closing, I believe that South Africa is uniquely positioned to become a major producer of healthy food, not just for its population but for much of Africa and the rest of the world," he concludes.



Technical Roots -

Access to online resources and training



Timely Hints – Tydige Wenke

June 2025



Our free Hortgro Footprint Webinar series covers essential and relevant sustainability topics for the deciduous fruit industry.

Guide to climate change and
pome/stone fruit production
in South Africa

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TRAINING VIDEOS

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Celebrating the future of the deciduous fruit industry

“This is one of the functions I like so much every year, because it provides us with a bit of bragging rights as far as the achievements in our learning and development department, bursaries, internships, work-integrated learning programs and more are concerned,” Anton Rabe began his talk at the 2025 Bursary Function held on Wednesday 23 April.

He congratulated Astrid Arendse and her team for the guidance in this project. Empowering future producers,

researchers and managers is challenging and Hortgro must make sure they offer a helping hand as best as possible, he added.

This year there are 25 undergraduates and 30 post-grads in the program, totalling 55 bursary students, attending institutions across the country. Undergraduate applications for 2025 were 1 455, indicating how big the need for student funding and appetite for agricultural careers are. “Those of you that made the cut must be extremely proud of yourself, but you must also realise this is an immense responsibility to ensure you utilise that opportunity to the betterment of yourself and the industry,” he emphasised.

Hortgro has recently reached out to their value chain stakeholders,

packhouses, exporters and some input- and service providers with the hope to double-up from 25 to 50 undergraduates. The industry is in need of as much new blood as possible. Apart from Hortgro Pome and Stone supplying the bulk of the funds at present, two bursaries were also received from Dried Tree Fruit whilst AgriSETA has also continued to contribute to the program.

Every year a veteran from the industry is asked to be a keynote speaker at the Bursary Function, but this year things went one better. Two former bursary holders, Gift Mdletshe and Tristan Dorfling were asked to share their stories. Their experience, from the horse's mouth so to speak

Both Gift and Tristan participated in further development programmes offered by Hortgro Learning and Development, namely the Work Integrated Learning programme facilitated by Lona Odendaal and the Hortgro Industry Leadership Development Programme. It is worth mentioning that the Work Integrated Programme which is an added mentorship to holistically develop interns, has a conversation rate of over 80% into permanent jobs. That is the proof of the pudding.

First up was Gift. "I am from a small town Mtunzini in the north of KZN and was fortunate to be recruited to come to Stellenbosch University (SU). All I ever wanted to be was a pharmacist, but when I got to SU, I discovered they don't offer the qualification!" he said with a shy smile.

Actually the core of his interest was science, and fortunately for the deciduous fruit industry, he found happiness in studying BSc Agric majoring in plant pathology and horticulture. After nearly completing his degree he still didn't know what would be next when one of his lecturers introduced him to Dr Iwan Labuschagne at Provar where he says he was basically shadowing, but applied for his MSc.

"Being at Provar and being a post-grad has been a rollercoaster, it's been challenging, but I am very honoured to be part of the team. I learned a lot about team dynamics and about myself. I am exposed to the industry and are very close to the people that I need to be with."



Gift Mdletshe and Elouise van Zyl

Tristan Dorfling also at first never considered agriculture, or more specifically, horticulture as a future. He never saw agriculture as a science. Then one day Prof Michael Schmeiser, a lecturer at SU took him to the experimental farm and explained horticulture to him. He was hooked.

Eventually he did his MSc in collaboration with Provar and today he is one of their project leaders managing root-stock trial for pome fruit, co-funded by Hortgro Science.

“What continues to inspire me about agriculture is the constant opportunity of working with nature to improve. To the bursary recipients here today I'd like to say you're stepping into an industry that needs you. And while the road

won't always be clear, if you stay open to learning and hold on to what made you choose this field, you'll go much further than you dreamed. Agriculture is full of opportunity, full of complexity, questions and real-world impact. If you love a good challenge, you're in the right place.”

Fast Facts About the HBP:

HBP currently boasts 25 undergraduate students at a cost of R1.7 million; studying at SU, Elsenburg, CPUT, North-West University, and the University of Cape Town.

Hortgro Science currently supports 30 post-graduate students at a cost of R4 million.

Some of the Hortgro bursary holders form part of the Hortgro Mentorship Programme. Currently, 42 students are placed in the following areas: Ceres, KBV, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Tulbagh, Wellington, Piketberg, Simondium, Porterville, Villiersdorp and Avontuur.

For more information about the Hortgro Bursary Programme, please visit www.hortgro.co.za or contact Astrid Arendse: astrid@hortgro.co.za



Tristan Dorfling

Making magic with mentorships

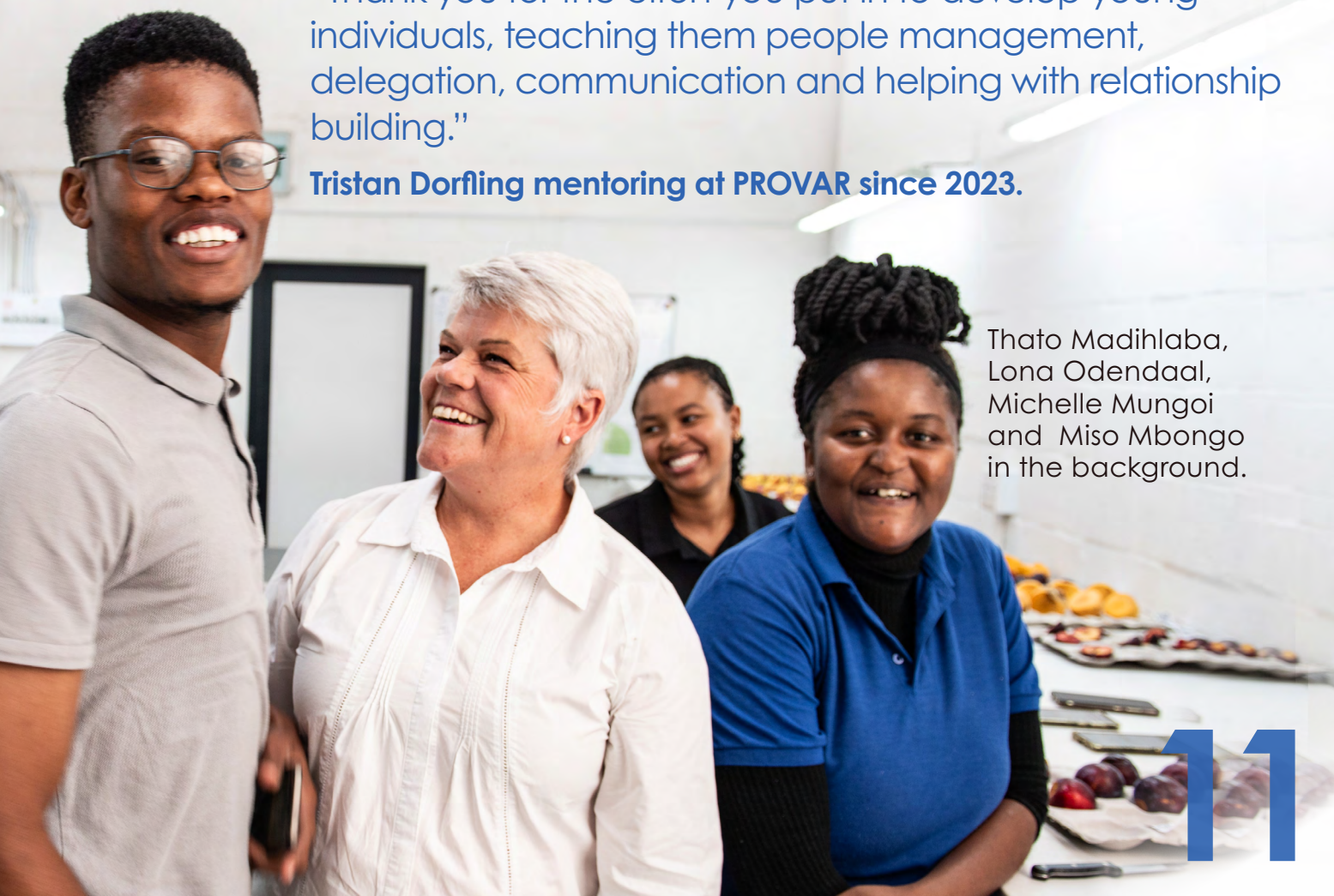
Adult education has been Lona Odendaal's focus from early on in her life. The development of peoples' potential and helping them to make the best of their circumstances has always been her passion.

After graduating in Home Economics and getting a Higher Education Diploma Lona's interesting career path began at the Department of Cultural Affairs as a home economist where she got involved in community projects which got the ball rolling. "From there I progressed to adult education for the Meat Board and I even qualified as a blockman ... well, blockperson."

Along the way she married Frederick Odendaal, an agri-economist and they eventually ended up in Ceres with him working for Ceres Fruit Growers. Being close to the Koue Bokkeveld Lona got involved with adult education at the Koue Bokkeveld Opleidingsentrum, focusing on life skills training which she still does. The next building block (she's a different kind of blockperson now)

"Thank you for the effort you put in to develop young individuals, teaching them people management, delegation, communication and helping with relationship building."

Tristan Dorfling mentoring at PROVAR since 2023.



Thato Madihlaba, Lona Odendaal, Michelle Mungoi and Miso Mbongo in the background.

was getting involved with the Harmonie and Bronaar foundations when they asked her to become a mentor for a group of five students. Helping them to understand the strange new process (being students at various tertiary institution) that they got into. She met them when they were in matric and while at Elsenburg, CPUT and Boland College, she coached them into the system, making them understand how this new life works.

“The programme covers issues that some of us are scared to talk about.”

Kheenan van Rooyen, Babylonstoren.

“Then, once they’ve done all the theory, they had to get a farm, institution, place to do their practical in order to graduate. I’ve found places for all of them, and after that, their fellow students started phoning me with a “Tannie kan jy ons ook help?” That’s where I realised how big the need is, because most of these students are not necessarily from farms, but need the farming experience. And there is a constant need for new blood in the business. That’s where the mentorship programme really started, culminating in an internship programme for Hortgro.”

She started off in 2011 with five students, today she is mentoring 42. “Last year I had 36, thinking that’s over my maximum, but how can you say no?” These 42 students are placed at 26 farming institutions, from farms to packhouses and labs across the Western Cape. It’s like having a class of 42 students, dispersed over 26 schools. But Lona knows them all well, knows what their needs,

strengths, weaknesses and standings are. The focus of the mentorship programme is on personal growth and adapting to the workplace. It’s about making the mind shift from student life to the real world of work. “I can’t teach them anything about agriculture, but it’s about seeing the person, helping them build on their strong points while identifying where they need to add extra focus on the weaker points. Sometimes a student takes a dip, losing focus and falling behind. That’s when I get the student to talk, finding out what is in their space, what’s bugging. Maybe he or she is just floating on the farm, sort of part of it, but not in a defined way. That’s when I have to convince them to ask the manager what they expect of them. If you don’t ask, you’ll never know. Students often feel overwhelmed and believe they have to impress. So much so that they are scared to ask what they deem to be stupid questions. The only stupid question is an unasked question,” Lona elaborates.

“The mentor program was amazing. It made everything feel better by providing a safe space.”

Tshegofatso Koagile at Bella Frutta 2023/4.

During the first quarter of the program Lona makes a point of visiting her students on all 26 farms or institutions. Almost every time the big disillusionment is when they learn that the academic qualification that got them where they are now is not the golden key. She has an acronym for DIPLOMA with D being

Discipline, then Integrity, Passion, Leadership, Opportunity, Motivation and Attitude. "I make them understand that the workplace is a learning school of a totally different degree. Go back to square one. I get them to evaluate themselves with a point out of 10 for each element of the acronym. Obviously there where they score the worst, is where they need to work the hardest. Thank goodness for WhatsApp, because from then on, we post and post and post."

"I learned values that matter the most in my life like leadership skills and confidence."

Petrus Seruwe, intern at Bo-Radyn, Villiersdorp while still studying at UNISA.

It's all about mind-set, she recons and uses an example. A person can either be in judger mind-set or in learner mind-set. The judger finds fault with everything where the learner accumulates knowledge, constantly growing. Her biggest kick is to convert a judger into a learner, steering them from self-doubt to self-belief.

The programme started in Ceres, but Hortgro and deciduous fruit is spread far and wide, not only in the Western Cape but as far as Langkloof and also the Free State and Mpumalanga, even Gauteng. "The next chapter is definitely Langkloof and I hope and wish we can reach as far as all the other deciduous fruit production areas. There are many students from all over coming to study here but then need to go back. Maybe this mentor must mentor new mentors to help them in all four corners of our deciduous fruit world." Nobody knows what the future holds, but the recent past tells a great story. From the 36 candidates in the program in 2024, 31 have either been employed permanently or have received extended internships. Because Lona is someone that always endeavours.

Mentoring is one of the most valuable forms of creating. Who better than one of the creative masters of our time, Steven Spielberg, to have the final word on it? "The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves."

"This program really helped me to manage my emotional skills much better. Tannie Lona is a great mentor."

Tashreeq Oliver, 2023 PROVAR intern. He is now permanently employed and is their in-house mentor.



Fifteen questions to Liza Ambraal

This is the column where we find out more about our peers in the deciduous fruit industry. What make them tick? Our next player is Liza Ambraal, shareholder and packhouse manager at Dwarsberg in Witzenberg near Ceres.

Liza Ambraal (née Verwey) was born and raised in Kimberley where she matriculated in 1989. After she got married, she moved to Ceres with her husband, Moos. Liza's love for farming began on

the farm Loxtonia in the Warm Bokkeveld where she has been working for the past 26 years. She started out sorting fruit, but used the opportunities the farm offered to climb the ladder.

Liza completed several courses at the Koue Bokkeveld Training Centre, including supervision, packaging and quality management, first aid as well as health and safety. This, her sheer determination and her dreams empowered her to progress from a fruit sorter to managerial level.



In November 2018, she was one of a distinguished group of 10 farmers from Loxtonia Farm to become the shareholders of Dwarsberg Farming (Pty) Ltd, a wholly owned black empowerment farm.

What is your best day of the week and why? Definitely Monday. Because it's a new week, a new beginning. A chance to right the wrongs.

What is the best advice you've ever received? Learn to not only listen, but to hear; to understand.

What is the best advice you've ever given? Learn to do what you do well, and make the best of the opportunities you have.

What is the best thing that ever happened to you? Becoming a shareholder of Dwarsberg.

What motivates you? My faith. God has helped me in so many ways in times I didn't know what to do.

What makes you cross or angry? When people abuse their position of power for selfish reasons.

If you can ask yourself a question what would it, AND the answer be? Am I happy?

I don't know, but I do know I'm content with what I have.

How do you spoil yourself? With a great storybook and a bowl of my favourite ice cream!

Do you have a hero? If so, who and why? Yes, my mother. Through all her circumstances and problems she never lost faith and always had a positive outlook on life.

What would you have wanted to be different in your life? Maybe there are a few things, but then again, if I had those, I wouldn't have been where, or the person I am now.

What was your favourite toy as a child? There never really was a favourite. We were six children and had to share everything.

What is the best food in the world for you? Although I live in the Western Cape, it's mieliepap! With meat and gravy.

What characteristic do you admire most in other people and why? Boldness, courage and decisiveness. Because I am an overthinker.

What is your favourite colour and why? Blue, because it inspires calmness and tranquillity.





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AGRI'S GOT TALENT

2025

AGT is a platform empowering agricultural workers in the fruit and wine industries to showcase their singing talents, develop life skills, and make a lasting impact on their communities.

Entries close 31 July 2025!



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16

RULES OF THE COMPETITION

- The entrants will be judged by a panel selected by the sponsors. The decision of the judges is final.
- The judges reserve the right to withhold the award depending on the merit of the entries.
- Only entries related to agricultural workers in the fruit and wine agricultural sectors (farms, packhouses, or cellars) will be accepted.
- Entrants must provide proof of employment.
- Please make sure that you submit all the details requested with your entry.
- By entering this competition, entrants accept the rules and thereby indemnify the sponsors against any liability in the case of injury, death, or any other cause arising from the competition.
- This competition is for amateur musicians only.
- No learners allowed.

CRITERIA

- Should be an agricultural worker in the fruit and/or wine industry working on a farm, packhouse, or in a cellar for a total of three months or longer in the past 12 months.
- You may only enter if you are an agricultural worker in one of the following industries: Apple, pear, plum, peach, nectarine, apricot, cherry, citrus, dried fruit (within the deciduous fruit industry, excluding raisins), wine, and table grapes.
- Entrants must be 18 years or older.
- May enter in any South African indigenous language.
- May only enter as a singer – no groups.
- Previous finalists may not enter again.

THE TOP 10 CONTESTANTS WILL PARTICIPATE IN A WEEK-LONG SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP IN THE WESTERN CAPE FROM 14-19 SEPTEMBER 2025.

THEY WILL SHOWCASE THEIR TALENTS ON STAGE, WITH THE WINNER BEING SELECTED BY A PANEL OF JUDGES. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE WINNER WILL FOLLOW IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FINAL PERFORMANCES.

HOW TO ENTER:

- 1** Record a video clip or voice note of no longer than 3 minutes.
- 2** Add the following details to the text:
 - Name and surname
 - ID number
 - Own contact number
 - Name of farm, packhouse, or cellar where you work and how long you have been working there.
 - Position
 - Name of nearest town
- 3** Send your entry via WhatsApp to 082 372 1557.

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