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The Hortgro Awards Celebrate Excellence in the South African Deciduous Fruit Industry



Somerset West — The annual Hortgro Awards brought together leading figures from the pome and stone fruit industry on Friday, 11 September 2026, for an evening of celebration at the Lord Charles in Somerset West. This year's event introduced two new categories: a photography competition themed "Capture the Heart of the Pome and Stone Fruit Industry", won by well-known author, videographer and photographer Jaco Wolmarans, and the Hortgro Footprint Award, which recognises excellence in sustainability and natural resource management.

Directors: NDV Dicey (Chairman) | J Du Preez (Chief Executive Officer) | CVDM Du Toit | CG Herbst
AG Petersen | A Rabe (Executive Director) | U Speirs

The evening also paid tribute to Anton Rabe, Hortgro Executive Director, who is stepping down after 38 years of leading the industry.

Below are this year's award winners and why they were selected.

[Izithelo Media Award 2026 | Lucentlands Media](#)

Criteria: Recognises outstanding journalism in and about the deciduous fruit industry, and the media's role in fostering constructive engagement between the industry and its stakeholders.

Motivation: Founded in 2019 by Dewald Kirsten and Louise Brodie, Lucentlands Media receives this year's Izithelo for its podcast series exploring the people, challenges and innovations across the pome and stone fruit value chain. By giving growers, researchers, exporters and industry leaders a platform to share their perspectives, Lucentlands has turned complex agricultural and economic issues into accessible, engaging conversations—amplifying the industry's voice and deepening public understanding of its importance to South Africa's economy and rural communities.

[Daan Strydom Science and Technology Award | Dr Elke Crouch](#)

Criteria: Recognises excellence, or a lifetime contribution, in research, science and technology within the industry.

Motivation: Since joining Stellenbosch University's Department of Horticultural Science in 2003, Dr Elke Crouch has become an internationally respected leader in postharvest fruit physiology. As Hortgro's Post-Harvest Physiology Research Chair in Deciduous Fruit, she has investigated challenges such as internal browning in apples, superficial scald in 'Granny Smith' and mealiness in 'Forelle' pears, directly protecting fruit quality, reducing waste and safeguarding producer returns. Beyond her scientific output, she has supervised generations of postgraduate researchers and, as Head of the Department since 2023, continues to build the academic and technical foundation the industry relies on.

[Hortgro Transformation Award 2026 | Peter Dall](#)

Criteria: Recognises a person or group who has made a significant impact in transforming the deciduous fruit industry's value chain.

Motivation: Peter Dall's commitment to transformation dates back to 1998, when — shortly after deregulation — he co-developed the industry's founding Declaration of Intent for Transformation with Anton Rabe. Since 2011, he has served on the Commodity Project Allocation Committee, helping to direct investment and development support across the sector, while mentoring emerging businesses and opening his networks to support their

growth. Nearly three decades of sustained, hands-on commitment make him a fitting recipient of this award.

[Hortgro Footprint Award | Steven Versfeld, Achtertuint Farm](#)

Criteria: A new award, recognising producers, exporters, packhouses and industry partners leading the way in sustainability, innovation and responsible natural resource management.

Motivation: Steven Versfeld's environmental commitment began in 1996, when he and his father started transitioning Achtertuint Farm in the Ceres region towards biological farming. An early adopter of a carbon footprint calculator in 2011, he has since cleared alien vegetation from surrounding mountain slopes, adopted regenerative agriculture and integrated pest management, and made Achtertuint the pilot site for Hortgro's soil carbon removal project. In 2021, he became the first South African producer to achieve SIZA Platinum Status with zero non-compliances — a body of work the judges described as a powerful inspiration for the wider industry.

[Hortgro Chairman's Award | Lindi Benić](#)

Criteria: Honours individuals who have made an exceptional contribution to the industry through long-term service or outstanding achievement.

Motivation: Lindi Benić joined the then Deciduous Fruit Producers' Trust in 1999 and has spent 27 years building the systems and relationships underpinning the industry's market access and food safety work. As Manager of Trade and Market Access Affairs for Hortgro and SATI, she built the technical teams and structures that opened and maintained export markets and co-developed the industry's MRL Guideline on the use of plant protection products — work that, though often done behind the scenes, earned her the respect of regulators and colleagues alike.

[Hortgro 1662 Industry Award | Gielie Bester](#)

Criteria: Recognises an individual who has made an exceptional impact on the industry in any sphere — including economics, transformation, training, governance, the value chain, or trade relations.

Motivation: Known throughout the sector as "Mr Stone Fruit," Michiel "Gielie" Bester has spent more than five decades in the stone fruit industry — from technical officer at the Deciduous Fruit Board to his current role as a consultant at In2Stone. Never seeking recognition for himself, he has quietly mentored generations of producers and served on numerous industry bodies, helping to grow South African stone fruit from a niche category into a significant global player.

OSH Reinecke Frontrunner Award | Anton Rabe

Criteria: Recognises an individual who has shown the courage, foresight and commitment to help shape the direction of the industry.

Motivation: After 38 years of service, including his tenure as Executive Director of Hortgro, Anton Rabe leaves a legacy built on collaboration rather than a single defining achievement. He has consistently brought growers, researchers, exporters and government together to navigate shifting markets, climate pressures and regulatory change, always keeping the industry's people — not just its production figures — at the centre of his leadership. His 38 years of institutional knowledge and relationship-building have helped keep the voice of South African deciduous fruit relevant on the world stage.

About Hortgro: Hortgro represents the interests of deciduous fruit producers across South Africa, supporting the pome and stone fruit industries through research, transformation, market access and sustainability initiatives.



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- **For more information about the winners, click on the links provided in the green straps**

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