

Agricultural Writers SA Awards recognise 2019 top contributors

South Africa's top contributors to agriculture have been recognised at the Agricultural Writers SA Awards. The event, sponsored by Bayer, Rovic Leers, Santam Agri and Sanlam gives recognition to the work of those that seek to elevate food security and rural economies.



The three winners from left to right: Dirk Louw, Nick Serfontein and Buks Nel - © Helenus Kruger

Nick Serfontein from the Free State has been named Farmer of the Year, Buks Nel from the Western Cape is the Agriculturalist of the Year and Dirk Louw from the Northern Cape is the winner of the New Entrant to Commercial Agriculture award.

Outstanding leadership in agriculture

Speaking at the gala event held in Pretoria on 15 November, Agricultural Writers SA chairperson, Liza Bohlmann, congratulated the winners and said that the award recipients were not only recognised for excellence in their respective fields, but for their outstanding leadership in agriculture. "We are proud to be associated with you and thank you for your dedication to this higher calling that is agriculture."

"This evening is about more than celebrating excellence. It is also to acknowledge the vital role agriculture plays in every human's life. Our very existence as a species relies on the expertise, grit and determination of big and small farmers, as well as farmworkers to remain in agriculture and to do so successfully.

"We also acknowledge the role of the men and women nominated as agriculturist of the year. With their support and knowledge, this battle against the odds can continue. It is our members' privilege to report on the stories of these heroes of agriculture."

The candidates

Nick Serfontein – Agricultural Writers SA Farmer of the Year 2019

Headed up by Nick Serfontein, the Sernick Group is a diversified agricultural business that owns the whole value chain from farm to fork. They are based in Edenville and Kroonstad in the Free State and farming operations include a Bonsmara stud, feed factory, feedlot and a deboning facility.

The group employs 615 people and the economic impact of their activities is estimated to be R2,37 billion per annum. Serfontein has been appointed to President Cyril Ramaphosa's advisory panel on land reform.

Dirk Louw – Agricultural Writers SA New Entrant to Commercial Agriculture 2019

Dirk Louw manages his farming enterprise, Silver Moon Investments, in the district of Groblershoop. He was awarded Raisins SA's Upcoming Farmer of the Year award last year.

Currently Louw farms on 68ha, of which 21ha is rented. His farming enterprise comprises 30ha dry grape vineyards, 1ha of wine grape vineyards, 24ha pecan nut trees and 14ha of interchangeable crops. He also farms with Dorpers and Meatmasters. His strongest farming enterprise is raisins, and Louw had a record harvest of 200 ton this year. Most of his raisin harvest is exported to the Middle East.

Buks Nel – Agricultural Writers SA Agriculturalist of the Year 2019

Although Buks is globally recognised as an industry expert on integrated pest management, he went on to focus on new and improved cultivar development at Tru-Cape. At present, he is the new variety specialist at Tru-Cape, where he has worked since its inception in 2001.

After many years of walking orchards, Buks received the Plant Breeder's Rights for the improved Gala and Fuji strains, Bigbucks and Fuji Royal.

While looking ahead to the new, he has also made an enormous contribution to finding and preserving old apple and pear varieties – including heading the search (with Tru-Cape colleague Henk Griessel) for the first recorded apple at the Cape.



From left to right: Dr Klaus Eckstein from Bayer, Buks Nel and Liza Bohlmann - © Helenus Kruger

Journalist and communicator awards

During the event, members of the Agricultural Writers SA were honoured for their role in communicating issues of interest to the agricultural sector and aiding in responsible communication of the sector.

The winners of the respective categories are:

CropLife SA Crop Protection Article Award: Lloyd Philips

FNB Communicator of the Year Award:

1. Werner Scholtz
2. Lloyd Philips
3. Charl van Rooyen

BKB Photo Competition:

Agricultural Photographer of the Year: Charl van Rooyen

Agricultural Photo of the Year: Johan Norval

Bayer Technical Article Award:

1. Petru Fourie
2. Lindi Botha
3. Ursula Human

Santam Agriculture Farmer of the Year Best Coverage Award:

Johan van der Merwe

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