

## NEWS RELEASE

### GRAIN FARMER IS SOUTH AFRICA'S FARMER OF THE YEAR

Alfonso Visser, a grain farmer from Hartswater on the Vaalharts-irrigation scheme in the Northern Cape has been awarded as South Africa's Farmer of the Year for 2008.

The award was made in Stellenbosch by Agricultural Writers SA, Old Mutual, Mutual & Federal and Nedbank.

Prof Maryke Labuschagne, head of Plant Sciences at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein has been awarded as National Agriculturist of the Year.

Marlon de Jager of Aberdeen in die Eastern Cape has been awarded as the National Emerging Farmer of the Year.

Visser cultivates 50 ha of pecan nuts and citrus and 1 137 ha of wheat and peanuts under irrigation at Vaalharts and next to the Vaal River at Christiana.

By planning to add value, the farming undertaking started in 1999 from which P Farm Agents Ltd derived. Today it handles between 20 and 25 percent of South Africa's peanuts – about 19 000 tons – by processing its own products as well as those of co-farmers for national and international markets.

Just Nuts is another extension, processing flavoured peanuts for the local market as well as blanching peanuts for Black Cat and Nola.

Another business undertaking, P Farm Pecans, was established in 2006 and handles 10 to 15 percent of the processing and marketing of South Africa's pecan nuts, with the emphasis on the international market.

Visser is also part of a group of Vaalharts farmers who own a cotton gin - Vaalharts Cotton. He is the single biggest shareholder. .

The fact that the business developed from nothing to a highly successful farming enterprise with different agri-businesses with an annual turnover of R250 million in only 19 years, is remarkable to say the least.

Visser is extensively involved in organised agriculture. This includes positions as executive member, representative and/or director of a local farmer union, an irrigation study group, the Vaalharts-cotton plant, Grain SA and the Peanut Forum. He is closely involved with the development of black farmers and is busy with black empowerment in his farming and agribusinesses.

Labuschagne obtained all her degrees at the University of the Free State and completed courses in, among others, Sweden and Canada. From 1986 to 1989 she was with the Small Grain Institute in Bethlehem, before joining the university.

She served or serves on various national and international associations and bodies, including as chairperson of the Southern African Plant Breeders Association, executive member of the SA

Association of Crop Production, professional member of the American Association of Grain Chemists, as South Africa's official representative since 2007, as well as executive member of the SA Grain Science and Technology Association.

Prof Labuschagne obtained her PhD with research on the genetics of the baking quality of wheat. For the past ten years she and her team have been doing groundbreaking work on gluten protein wheat, the only researchers in South Africa working in this field. Gluten is the most important determining factor in the baking quality of wheat.

In Sweden she received training in measuring the quality of wheat. She worked with the Technical University of Budapest in Hungary on the gluten qualities of wheat for two years. Her research findings cast light on the gluten protein appearing in South African wheat and how it is influenced by the environment, fertilizing and heat and cold stress.

The same research techniques have been used since to improve the quality of maize, especially high lysine maize where protein quality and quantity as well as starch quality is of utmost importance.

This year she received an award and R30 000 from the SA Grain Science and Technology Association for Research and Development as well as a trophy and R100 000 from the National Science and Technology Institute for research and capacity development over the past ten years.

De Jager lost his father at the age of eight months, leaving him in the care of his mother and grandmother. However, nothing would deter him from the urge to farm and he made this a reality when he bought his first sheep ewes at an auction in 1992.

After struggling for government assistance, he decided that might tie him down to farm commercially and he continued to become the successful farmer he is today at his own cost.

Efficient management, good financial discipline and labour management gave rise to purchasing of private land adjacent to the common. The farming operations are still developing and he produces 15 to 18 tons of lucerne per hectare while his Dorper herd increased to 750 ewes over the past 16 years. He also farms with Nguni and Hereford cattle and goats.

(Ends)

Date: 15 November 2008



The winners!

Agricultural Writers SA's National Farmer, Agriculturist and Emerging Farmer of the Year were announced on 14 November. From left - Charl Senekal, Chairman of Pro Agri Forum, Andries Wiese, Manager of Mutual & Federal Agriculture, Alfonso Visser, Farmer of the Year, Schalk Burger, Market Development Manager (Agri)Old Mutual, Prof Maryke Labuschagne, Agriculturist of the Year, Hugo Lochner, Chairman Agricultural Writers SA, Marlon de Jager, Emerging Farmer of the Year, Rico Basson, Divisional Head of Nedbank Agriculture and Stephan Legge, General Manager Mutual & Federal.