

CGA Citrus Summit Honours Its Citrus Legends

GLORIA WEARE

The celebrated gala dinner has certainly become the *piece de resistance* of the prestigious biannual CGA Summit. It's during the awards ceremony at this dinner that the highly-anticipated announcement of the next three Citrus Legends takes place.

Chosen by their predecessors, the identity of these stalwarts is kept under wraps until the announcement on the night. And this year, the reveal was met with the same roaring applause and emotion as before.

MILAAN THALWITZER

Milaan supports land reform that's done in a structured and inclusive manner, therefore he's implemented projects accordingly.

He's a visionary leader – as evidenced by his role in an array of citrus leadership positions. These include Chairing the Outspan Board for six years, Vice Chairman of Capespan, Founder member and Chairman of both Houers Koöperatief and Granor Passi. The latter two are highly successful in carton manufacturing and juice processing – ensuring that growers partake in both the upstream and downstream elements of the value chain.

Milaan believes in a strong and structured citrus industry in SA, and played a role in structuring the industry during the regulated era. His support, passion and commitment towards citrus industry structures continued unabated in the deregulated era.

In 1965, his father, brother and he began farming on the banks of

the Letaba River. Milaan has since grown this farming business, remarkably expanding the growing area and integrating into the commercial exporting of his own fruit – building a brand that is recognised around the globe for its high quality, reliable service and ethical trading. He's expanded his enterprise from 100 ha in 1965 to 4 413 ha today, exporting some 6.2 million cartons of citrus. The farm also produces bananas, avocado, litchi, mango, blueberry, macadamia and sugar.

Deeply aware of the challenges that face farmers in SA, Milaan has implemented land reform projects and founded many initiatives aimed at helping to facilitate land reform in a structured and inclusive manner.

His family business is run on sound corporate principles, ensuring disciplined governance and successful processes, with honesty and integrity. His communication and management skills have brought the best out of those who work with him. Milaan was awarded National Farmer of the year in 2014, one of the highest accolades in the industry; he was also featured on the TV programme, 'MegaBoere'.

His passion for Africa and exploring the continent has even had him travel from Letsitele to Cairo. Milaan loves fishing and golf, but more importantly, this legend is a family man who's a loving husband to Antoinette, a respected father and father-in-law, and a doting grandfather.

GERRIT VAN DER MERWE

A true leader and collaborator, Gerrit effortlessly got people on board when it mattered most.

This departed legend will always be remembered for the twinkle in his eye and his can-do attitude. When a challenge arose, not only did he face it, he ran towards it.

He was a founder member of Citrus South Africa – a grower organisation that sought to instill discipline in a deregulated environment. Gerrit was also founder member and Chairman of what is now known as Summer Citrus. He should have been called "Mr Collaboration" – believing that doing things together was better



Milaan Thalwitzer receiving his certificate and award from the 2017 Citrus Legend Freet.



Gerrit's son, Gerrit Junior, received the award on behalf of his late father from Barend, son of the 2017 Citrus Legend Edward Vorster.



David received his certificate and award from Mariana, widow of 2017 Citrus Legend Hennie le Roux.

than going it alone. And his leadership ability and perseverance got others onboard.

To this day, he's viewed as the father of SA citrus exports to the US, because he played a leading role in gaining the original access. This achievement made him realise the strength in working together.

In the earlier years he interacted closely with the Australian industry (at that time the only other Southern Hemisphere citrus producing country with US access), in order to promote responsible and orderly marketing into the US. Gerrit travelled extensively to and through the US, ensuring that the US programme delivers what the buyers expect and what the growers demand. Under his watch SA volumes to the US increased from 200 000 cartons in 1998 to close to 4 million today. During times of crisis Gerrit kept a level head, working on solutions that many had either not thought of, or deemed impossible. For him, nothing was impossible.

It is doubtful that any citrus family has the provenance of this legend. His family have been farming on their farm since 1750. They now farm on 900 ha of citrus orchards. With a doctrine of inclusivity, the farm is focused on job creation and community upliftment, and workers are looked after from an educational, medical and social point of view. Through his Fairtrade accreditation, and from his own resources, this legend supported those associated with his farming ventures. And it's these very ventures that also earned Gerrit the Agriwriters Farmer of the Year award in 2010.

He opened his doors and his home to everybody – and all who visited felt truly welcomed. Gerrit was extremely proud of his farming ventures, and of his children who joined him on the farm. He was a doting grandfather and loving husband to Lizette.

Gerrit is fondly remembered for his sayings: "Moenie 'n goeie storie met feite opmors nie"; "Jy gaan eendag net so dom wees soos ek" and "Ons bly eers stil en kyk wat hulle ons aanbied". These sayings and many more depict a man with an irrepressible sense of humor, a love for all and a great adventurer. Though his passing was sad, he died in December 2018 doing what he loved most – exploring Africa.

DAVID LOTTER

David realises the significant role of agriculture in uplifting the developing economies of under-privileged rural areas.

The leadership positions that this legend has held will be hard to beat. These include Chairman of: the South African Co-operative Citrus Exchange (SACCE), Outspan International, Fresh Fruit International (formed to coordinate the joint support services venture of Outspan and Unifruco on overseas markets) and a Director of PPECB, amongst other board positions.

But David Lotter did not only operate in the boardroom. At the tender age of 32 he was appointed general manager of Letaba Estates near Tzaneen, and from 1967 to 1974 he was executive estate director of Zebedelia and Letaba estates, farming on the biggest citrus estate in the southern hemisphere. In this role this legend realised the importance of research and technical input in the industry, tackling the CBS challenges head-on in those early years. Having an MSc in Agricultural Engineering, he had extensive knowledge of underground water and gained experience in the irrigation of tree crops. Under his watch the estates that he managed became leaders in the production of citrus, mangos and bananas.

David received the State President's Order for Meritorious Service for outstanding merit in the public interest, and the University of Pretoria's Chancellor's medal for his outstanding contribution to agriculture and the economy in general, and especially the South African fruit industries. He believes that agriculture must play an important role in uplifting the developing economies of under-privileged rural areas. He was on the board of the Gazankulu Development Corporation and through his position as Chairman, assisted in developing Lisbon Estates into a major fruit producing operation.

David is a loving father and grandfather.

