

Citrus Legends 2023



The announcement of the Citrus Legends has become a highlight on the CGA Citrus Summit programme. By Tanya Ungerer (adapted from Justin Chadwick's weekly newsletters)

Launched in 2015, the CGA Citrus Summit provides the ideal setting for acknowledgement of the Citrus Legends. The 2023 Citrus Legends were Dr John Purchase, Kallie Schoeman and Arend Venter. Those in the know are sworn to secrecy when it comes to the identity of the legends. Chosen by their predecessors, the legends are recognised for their contribution to the growth, profitability and sustainability of the Southern African citrus industry, and for helping to achieve its competitiveness globally. This year, the three legends were awarded a personalised, signed and framed rugby jersey by rugby legend, Schalk Burger Jnr.

Dr John Purchase

John has received many accolades over the years – including the Alumnus of the Year from the University of the Free State in 2011; the South African Agricultural Writers Association Agriculturist of the Year award in 2012; and Knight of the Order of Agricultural Merit for his service to agriculture and agri-business from the French Government in 2018. "I am not sure if we should address him as Sir Legend," said Justin Chadwick during the award ceremony.

John attended Grey College, one of the premier rugby schools in the country, and matriculated from there in 1976. But it is his years in organised agriculture that marked his contribution to the citrus industry. His appointment to Business Unity South Africa committees, and National Economic and Labour Council (NEDLAC) task teams, have placed John at the forefront, where industry meets government and labour. His philosophy is to treat people with dignity and respect – which earned him trust in these circles, driving the goals of industry. There was never a problem too big or too complex for John – whatever issue the citrus industry and the rest of agriculture were dealing with, John found a way to assist. His present work on the Agriculture and Agro Processing Master Plan has tested his patience and philosophy to the limit. He has managed to cut through the smoke and dust created by those who break down and disrupt, to create a vision and a plan for those who want to build a thriving SA for our children. Although retired, he continues to drive his vision. "As a country, we face extraordinary challenges, but we must continue to build both social cohesion and the competitiveness of all our agricultural value chains through cultivated and respectful partnerships. A failure to do so will no doubt condemn us to a failed state and dire consequences."



Kallie Schoeman

Kallie started farming lettuce, tomatoes, cabbages and beetroot on 10 ha of land back in 1974. Soon thereafter, at the age of 24, he was appointed managing director of the family farming business – a business that had been in existence since 1919. Kallie decided to concentrate on citrus as a replacement for table grapes – a bold step when his grandfather had been called the father of soft fruit of the Transvaal.

He has built the business to 10 times the size from when he started in 1978 and has diversified into downstream and upstream value-added businesses. He is now the Group CEO of one of the biggest family farming concerns in SA, boasting 1 500 ha of citrus, 9 500 ha of maize, soya beans and white beans in the Highveld region. In the Northern Cape he farms 1 700 ha of wheat, maize, beans and pecan nuts. The farming group has 24 maize and soya silos with a capacity of 52 800 tonnes – providing storage, sifting and drying of these grains. In addition, to control input prices, the group has invested in the fertiliser sector.

Kallie believes in family and community. He has addressed many audiences on how to manage family farming, succession and expectations. With a novel approach to upliftment, he believes that the beneficiary should earn the benefits. Dry, white beans are a big part of his business. Thus, providing 60% of the beans used by Koo in their canned baked beans, Kallie is probably



1. Jock Danckwerts (left) and Arend Venter 2. Dr John Purchase (left) and Peter Nicholson 3. Kallie Schoeman (left) and Justin Chadwick (CEO: CGA)

where the knowledge and vast network that he had built up over the years gave Dole an edge on the competition. His knowledge of every citrus variety, and his relationships with individuals in the citrus sector as well as the broader agriculture sector are unparalleled. Arend's keen eye for detail helped to take Dole and its marketing plans from strength to strength.

Many of those who had the privilege of being mentored by Arend still display the values that he stood by: treating all people with respect, working hard, and building solid relationships. There is truth and realism in his words, "you can't be everything to everybody, somebody is bound to be upset with you".

As the industry emerged from the regulated era, he chartered some stormy seas and fiery meetings as chairman of the Citrus Marketing Forum from 2006 to 2008. The quote "do what you love, love what you do" is synonymous with Arend, who still works as a consultant in the industry.

Former legends:

- 2015 – Hoppie Nel, Dr Jock Dankwerts, Peter Nicholson.
- 2017 – Edward Vorster, Freek Dreyer, the late Hennie le Roux.
- 2019 – Milaan Thalwitzer, the late Gerrit van der Merwe Snr, David Lotter.

The legends are recognised for their contribution to the growth, profitability and sustainability of the citrus industry.

answerable for some of the methane gas emissions in SA.

Known for his quotes and clichés, he ended the opening of the CRI Citrus Symposium with, "get bigger, get better or get out". And in an interview, he said: "If people lead, government will follow." Their farming group mission is to be "as good as the best, and better than most". Kallie believes that he was destined to farm as his name means "bewerker van die grond".

Arend Venter

There are few in the citrus industry that have deeper roots than Arend Venter. He has dedicated his life to the citrus industry. In 1964 he started in the technical department of the Citrus Exchange, moving up the ranks in 1975 to operations manager of the local marketing department and in 1979 he was appointed as assistant general manager.

After deregulation Arend joined Dole,

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