

REWARDING INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP OF YOUNG FARMERS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2010 AGRI-SA NATIONAL YOUNG FARMER OF THE YEAR WINNER, JAN SCHEEPERS

Jan Scheepers, Liberhof Estate

Young Farmer's Association of Free State Agriculture

Sponsor: Dr Jim McGrann

Sub-theme: Innovation & Leadership

33 year old Mr Jan Scheepers farms in the Fouriesburg area, Free State Province, South Africa with the following enterprises:

Maize	-	45%	-	1 200ha
Beans	-	26%	-	600ha
Wheat	-	24%	-	600ha
Cattle	-	3.5%	-	300 head Bonsmara breed commercial herd
Sheep	-	1.5%	-	400 head Dohne Merino breed commercial herd

Mr Scheepers was recently nominated by the Young Farmer's Association to enter the 2010 Santam Agriculture / Free State Agriculture Young Farmer of the Year Competition. The Young Farmer's Association is a component of Free State Agriculture, a member's organisation of farmers in the Province affiliating to Agri SA and originators of the Young Farmer of the Year Award, starting in 2004.

The four finalists, selected through interviews based on information submitted in nomination forms, are judged on-farm by a team of expert adjudicators from various fields of agricultural production and management expertise.

Mr Scheepers won the competition qualifying for the Toyota-SA Agri-SA Young Farmer of the Year Competition. Also winning this award, Mr Scheepers is not only an ambassador and leader for young farmers (18 – 35 years of age) in the Free State but also in South Africa.

The competition adjudication process for the local competition takes place in two phases: In the first phase candidates are invited to an interview with the adjudicators based on the data supplied in their nomination forms. The finalists selected during this phase go through to the second phase which takes place on the respective finalists' farms.

The following selection criteria are used:

- Focus on the Future
- Administration including budgets and record keeping
- Production management – livestock

- Production management – crops and horticulture
- Marketing
- Maintenance
- Labour management and control
- Professional Profile

Innovations by Mr Scheepers that particularly impressed the adjudicators on provincial and national level were the way he motivated his labourers, how he made the necessary adjustments after his father retired from farming and how he stays positive, farming under challenging circumstances in South African.

Motivated labourers:

The adjudicators were particularly impressed with Mr. Scheepers' farming skills especially of his unique management style where each worker is responsible for his department, job, equipment with which he works. The farm workers earn above average compensation, enjoy good working conditions which leads to a motivated and happy workforce.

Mr Scheepers believes a happy and motivated workforce is of vital importance.

Succession planning and organisation structure:

Mr. Scheepers achieved a National Diploma in Agricultural Management at the Central University of Technology before entering the family business. He and his father, Michael Scheepers then farmed together until his father retired after which several adjustments were made. Mr. Scheepers now has full jurisdiction over the trading company, Liberhof Estate and is Managing Director of the company in which his father is also a director. Him and his father are trustees of the Liberhof Trust and they keep all the shares in the company Liberhof Estate.

Mr. Scheepers believes that family is the key to a successful future. His wife, Amelia, is a qualified accountant and is responsible for record keeping. Together they compile and analyze the management accounts.

Farming in an ever-changing political and global environment:

Food security is a responsibility of all farmers, especially young farmers.

Despite a challenging political climate at times in South Africa and Africa, Mr Scheepers stays positive. He believes the biggest threat to a farmer is the exposure to global markets, but also says that this has its benefits. He believes that as soon as threats are on a farmer's doorstep, it will motivate him to be more competitive, innovative and efficient.

Vision & Strategy

Mr Scheepers' vision is firstly to enjoy farming! In addition he wants to continue improving efficiency so that his business remains profitable in increasingly difficult farming conditions. He wants his business financially healthy that when opportunities and challenges arise that they can be timeously and strategically fully utilized.

Through innovation and leadership, Mr Scheepers is a true ambassador for young farmers in South Africa.