

## 'Politics make agricultural expansion too risky'

Christiaan Groenewald of New Cape Wines in the Breede River Valley won the 2017 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year award for his Eagle's Cliff Pinotage 2017. **Siyanda Sishuba** reports.

### How did you experience the trading and production environment in your business and the SA wine industry this past year?

The past year wasn't easy. A farmer has many obstacles to overcome, especially in the wine industry, where we have low margins. The rand was fairly favourable for exports, but the local market and economy are under pressure. The uncertain political situation and farm murders make life difficult, but we believe in the future. Provided we have enough water, 2018 looks positive for the wine industry. Personally, we had a good year, with exports and local sales growing. I think if we can sort out the political uncertainty and threats, SA agriculture could be a saving grace for the country in terms of job creation.

### What challenges and opportunities do 2018 hold for the industry?

With the worldwide shortage of wine, prices and demand will be good in 2018, which will be the first time in more than 20 years. The challenges will be the [December] election and all the political issues related to it. In addition, with the water shortage throughout the Western Cape, it will be a challenge to keep the vines alive to ensure future production.

### What investments are you planning to make on your farm in the next year?

We'll simply maintain and replant; it's too risky to expand too much at the moment with all the threats from government and politics. I plan to expand the winery and add a few other products that work in synergy with wine. I think we'll focus more on tourism, where we can already see good growth and interest.



ABOVE: Christiaan Groenewald (left) and Wade Roger-Lund, Diners Club Young Winemaker of the Year, accepting their awards. SUPPLIED

## 'Quality above all else'

Potato Farmer of the Year Nico Wagner sees opportunities in 2018. **Gerhard Uys** reports.

### How did you experience the trading and production environment for potatoes this past year?

There were high volumes of potatoes in the market throughout the year, which meant that prices were average. But these were at a level that was acceptable to both producers and consumers.

The drought did not particularly affect potato production overall. Farmers adjusted the quantity they planted according to what was happening in other regions. If one region could not plant, another would pick up the slack.

### What challenges and opportunities does 2018 hold?

Potato production draws considerable electricity. This, along with fuel and labour costs, affects producers directly. If these costs increase between 10% and 15%, this would make it very difficult to produce the crop profitably. On the other hand, there's always opportunity

for quality produce, which receives good prices. Quality is the only thing that creates opportunity. The aim is to keep the fact that your specific product is better than others in the subconscious of the consumer.

### What investments are you planning to make on your farm?

I want to invest in infrastructure and implements that save cost and keep production sustainable. Electricity use has to become more efficient. It's important to have fuel-efficient tractors and implements. Two- or three-in-one implements that can do two or three jobs at the same time will save fuel. There's a need to mechanise to save on labour costs, but mechanisation

must be directed to areas where labour can be a problem, such as an all-night shift or a shift that is too long.

### Are you optimistic about the future of farming in South Africa?

Being positive makes you see opportunities. If you're negative, you don't recognise opportunities. I'm optimistic, and politics doesn't stop me from investing in my business. We can't live for the future if we don't invest today. But at the moment I think twice before investing.



ABOVE: Potato Farmer of the Year 2017 Nico Wagner and his wife, Manlie. SUPPLIED