

Meet the FSA Young Farmer of the Year finalists

On 6 April 2017, the same day that the FSA Young Farmer Committee will celebrate their 32nd year in existence at their annual conference - this year under the theme of *The Young Farmer in the Global Market* - the 21st Free State Agriculture Young Farmer of the Year will be announced.



The team of judges are: Stefan Hanekom, Johann van Graan, Janus Henning, Prof. Pieter Fourie, Prof. Erhard du Toit, Boet Wilken and Dr. Cobus le Roux.

The speakers at the event include Jacques Celliers, CEO of FNB SA, and Dr. Dirk Strydom, manager of Grain Economy and Marketing at Grain SA. Myan Subrayan will be the motivational speaker of the day.

The competition originated in the Free State, and it is presented to empower young farmers for sustainable growth by means of organised agriculture. It enables the young farmer to focus on aspects of his farming operation which he may have taken for granted before. A team of judges visited the three finalists on 14 and 15 February 2017.

Meet the finalists

Willie Stols

"I was born and raised a farmer."



Willie and Wilmien Stols

Willie and Wilmien Stols farms on the farm Gelykvlaakte, that has been in the Stols family for more than 108 years. Under the guiding hand of his father, Willie planted his first crop in 2006. Eleven years later the smell of wet red soil, maize, cattle, and sheep is still his reason for getting up in the morning.

Stols’ vision for the future includes improved precision farming as well as managing his farming enterprise to become more efficient and profitable. His father gladly shares his knowledge and assists him with advice, especially with advice that has filtered down generations of farmers. Stols would like to focus more on planning and making changes in terms of below average rainfall.

According to Stols, young farmers are the food producers and providers of the future. “To survive we will have to increase profit and earnings so that we can make a positive contribution towards the economy and the country.”

Enterprises	% of the total farming enterprise	Scope (ha or LSU)
White Maize	40%	450ha
Yellow Maize	15%	90ha
Sunflower	25%	250ha
Sheep	10%	800ha
Cattle	10%	200ha

Stols started a 50ha overlay system on the farm. He also manages moisture levels by focusing on the amount of livestock per ha to prevent overgrazing. Some of the most important resource conservation practices that he focuses on, is planting tef or dry land lucern on un-used optimal lands. With the assistance of good workshop staff and in cooperation with his father they build, repair or improve farming equipment before buying new equipment.

Stols is a member of Free State Agriculture, Vierfontein Farmer’s Association, Grain SA and the Manna Study Group. He also forms part of the local safety structures and is a member of the fire protection association.

A video that was taken of Stols while the judges visited him, is available [here](#).

Johan van Huyssteen

'Diversification may be good, but I choose to specialise!'



Johan and Juanita van Huyssteen

Johan and Juanita van Huyssteen farm on Bloekom in the Virginia district. He farms with his father. According to Van Huyssteen, he is a perfectionist and planner, characteristics he tries to implement in all areas of his farming operation. The best way of doing things is to think of and try and plan for everything. Van Huyssteen does, however, believe in simplicity; the easier, simpler and faster - the better!

The most significant change that he brought into the farming operation was the use of pre-planting preparation and precision equipment. Top dressing is no longer applied, which contributes to better root development.

Enterprise	% of the total farming enterprise	Scope (ha or LSU)
Maize	100.00%	2500ha
Cattle	0% still building herd	125

His future vision for the farming enterprise is to grow sustainability, manage risks and farm more effectively. Van Huyssteen would also like to use technology more effectively in future.

Some of the most significant risks that he has to manage include drought and the price of products. The 50% overlay system that is used contributes to good yields and it counters drought conditions. With regards to price management, steps are followed in cooperation with companies that supply information. “With good information, informed decisions can be made that contributes to limiting risks.”

Van Hyssteen is an active member of the community and farmer’s association. He is someone who can take the lead and inspire others. Currently, he is the chairperson of Virginia Landbou as well as the local fire protection association. Previously he was also a member of Free State Agriculture’s Young Farmer Committee.

A video that was taken during the visit at the Van Huyssteens is available [here](#).

Herman Archer

"Will you be doing it... Or am I doing it myself?"



Herman Archer

Herman Archer has been farming with his father on the farm Settlement in the Trompsburg district the past five years. He considers himself to be a strong leader who can think on his feet in pursuit of perfection. He can make decisions under pressure and stick with them. Tasks are completed fast and efficiently, while he chooses to 'think outside the box' when it comes to problem-solving. Archer is focused on making a difference in his community and agriculture, and he rather focuses on solutions than to just moan about issues.

Archer's vision for the future includes producing top quality wool, lambs of high quality and to improve reproduction. He would also like to expand the farming enterprise by, for instance, incorporating a hamlet farming component.

The most significant risks for Archer's farming enterprise includes management of predators, the prevention of wildfires and taking weather conditions into account. Archer strives to use the farm optimally by following nature and weather patterns and to ensure that livestock is managed in such a way that overgrazing is prevented. Where water is available on his farm, he tries to optimally irrigate fields to add value to the farming operation.

Enterprises	% of the total farming enterprise	Scope (ha or LSU)
Merino Sheep	100.00%	1720ha

According to Archer, young farmers fulfill a very important role in the economy of South Africa. "Young farmers approach the economy and agriculture with a different perspective, as they think outside the box, which is important to promote agriculture."

Archer is the chairperson of Trompsburg Landbou, vice chairperson of the NWGA in the Free State and the vice chairperson of the Red Meat Producer's organisation in the Free State (FSRPO). He serves on the executive management of the South African Sheep Shearing Federation (SASSF), while he is also a judge for shearing and wool handling on national level.

A video that was taken during the visit to Archer is available [here](#).

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