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Citrus legend

Homage to the late Gerrit van der Merwe

May 30th, 2019

Tags: [citrus](#), [south africa](#), [farming](#)



This legend will always be remembered for a twinkle in his eye and a can do attitude. When a challenge arose he did not only approach it, but ran towards it in order to sort it out.

This legend should have been called “Mr Collaboration”—he firmly believed that doing things together was better than doing things alone—and he had the leadership ability and perseverance to make others believe it. He was a founder member of Citrus South Africa—a grower organization that sought to bring discipline into a deregulated environment.

This legend is viewed as the father of South African citrus exports to the USA. He played a leading role in gaining original access. Once access was gained he realized the strength in working together—as a founder member and Chairman of what is now known as Summer Citrus. In the early 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 USA. He travelled extensively to and through the USA, ensuring that the US program delivers what the buyers expect and what the growers demand.

Under his watch South African volumes to the USA have increased from 200 000 cartons in 1998, to close to 4 million today. During times of crisis this legend kept a calm head, working on solutions that many had either not thought of, or deemed impossible. For this legend nothing was impossible.

I am doubtful that any citrus family has the provenance of this legend—his family have farmed on their farm since 1750. They now farm on 900 hectares of citrus orchards. With a doctrine of inclusivity, the farm is focused on job creation and community upliftment—workers are looked after from an educational, medical and social point of view.

Through his Fairtrade accreditation, and from his own resources, this legend has supported those associated with his farming ventures.

His farming venture earned him the Agriwriters Farmer of the Year award in 2010.

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

He is well remembered for his sayings—“Moenie ‘n goeie storie met feite opmors nie” (“Don’t spoil a good story with facts”) or “Jy gaan eendag net so dom wees soos ek” (“One day you’ll be as dumb as me”) and “Ons bly eers stil en kyk wat hull ons aanbied” (“We’ll hold still and see what they have to offer”). These sayings and many more depict a man with an irrepressible sense of humor, a love for all and a great adventurer. This Legend died doing what he loved most—exploring Africa.

This Citrus Legend is the late Gerrit van der Merwe.

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