

New captains of SAAGA optimistic about future of avocados

As the South African Avocado Growers Association (SAAGA) looks forward to a good yield and a 50th anniversary to celebrate, it has made two new appointments.

Athol Currie has been appointed chairperson of SAAGA and will be supported by Sizwe Magagula, who takes up the position of vice-chairman. Both come from strong agricultural backgrounds with a vision of robust growth and opportunities for a new generation of avocado producers over the next couple of years.



Athol Currie



Sizwe Magagula

“This year, SAAGA celebrates its 50th anniversary as a voluntary association and the work done by our founding members regarding our association’s philosophy has laid a solid foundation for us to build upon. We’re very aware that we face

challenges but are all in agreement that these present SAAGA with an opportunity to reflect and focus on issues that affect us going into the future,” Currie said.

Preparing for growth

Opportunity, he added, lies in the fact that avocados are becoming more of a mainstream product, as is reflected in the universal growth in consumption. “Current growers are looking to expand and maximise production, and farmers from other sectors are viewing avocado production as a viable option to replace or add to their current operations. We need to be prepared for this growth - while remaining focused on our current members’ needs - and make sure we cater for the new generation of growers.”

Another key aspect of the anticipated growth, according to Magagula, is that SAAGA is ready to supply alternate markets, such as the USA, China, and Japan, when these open up. “I would like to see us developing stronger relations with the government to harness opportunities to grow the industry, locally and abroad. This, I believe, will be achieved by improved research, transformation in the industry and by getting unproductive avocado areas back into production.

“Continuous development of the local market will provide the industry with a sustainable outlet which could be a hedge against changes in global market conditions,” he said.



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Contributing to agriculture, food security

With food security topping most governments’ agendas, Magagula prides himself on being a contributor to the vitally important agricultural sector. “Agriculture is fascinating; it is the very foundation of civilisation and remains a significant contributor to our GDP.”

Currie too is driven by the complexities of modern day agriculture. “It’s an exciting and rewarding career. I am passionate about contributing to food security through responsible farming techniques and being able to share my knowledge with others.”

With regards to this season’s yield, Currie said favourable weather conditions and sound practices by producers are bound to promote good quality and size fruit – better, he added, than in 2016. “The export crop estimate is 12.5 million four kilogram cartons, which is a similar size to that of the 2015 crop,” he said.

The new captains of SAAGA concluded by saying they are up to the challenges ahead and look forward to providing members with outstanding avocado focused service underpinned by open engagement, robust communication, and clear objectives.

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