

Perspective



The X factor

The first 10 years of PALS

On 19 August 2014 a group of farmers and representatives of agricultural businesses from the Koue Bokkeveld, Ceres, Wolseley and Tulbagh got together to form Witzenberg Partnership, now better known as Partners in Agri Land Solutions or PALS in short. On 22 August 2024, exactly 10 years and three days later, the highly anticipated 10th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Witzenberg PALS took place, bringing together its members from across the region. The meeting was attended by 90 guests and a further 132 viewers via the live streaming channel. Marking this 10-year milestone, PALS stuck to its humble roots, choosing to celebrate with the same simplicity and spirit that defined its early days.

The meeting commenced with an overview from Vice Chairperson, Hennie du Toit, who highlighted achievements over the past years. "The PALS philosophy is based on integrity, honesty, respect, trust, transparency, commitment and accountability," Hennie reminded everyone. "In the past 10 years the concept grew from a humble beginning into a national initiative and brand."

Mariette Kotze of Hortgro congratulated PALS' unique way of defining and achieving their success. The presentation of the annual financial statements by David-John Groenewald explained and indicated yet another clean audit.

- The first 10 and next 10 years of PALS – 1
- What a wineful world – 4
- The heartbeat of farming – 6
- The Ridge that guards the grapes – 8
- The house on the rock – 9
- News in Short – 10
- The future belongs to the youth – 13

Inside
this issue



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Members Pieter du Toit, Jaffie Galant and Raymond Koopstad shared a reflection on 10 years of growing together. Gerrit van Vuuren, founder of PALS, shared highs and lows, with exceptional moments from the past 10 years. "I remember at the historical 19 August 2014 meeting when Gys du Toit, one of the stalwarts in agriculture for many years asked me with who are we going to talk to on government level. When I said that we have to go all the way to the secretary general and ministers, he wished me all success with a bit of doubt in his voice. Today PALS is used to talking to many ministers, the president, even world leaders."

Prof Marius Ungerer, from Stellenbosch Business School and keynote speaker, delivered an insightful perspective on the pioneering role of PALS in land reform and why its winning ways stand as a beacon of innovation and excellence. "Thank you for setting an example of how courage and teamwork can create partnerships and results that are inspiring, motivating and hope-giving for all of us. Going forward, may PALS be even more central in creating a better future for all stakeholders in the agricultural value chain and ecosystem."

The AGM was highlighted by the title deed handover to KLP Agri, a great moment that reinforced the value of teamwork and dedication by committed partners and the PALS team. It's one of more than 50 success stories. Blood, sweat and ultimately tears of joy.

"I am deeply grateful for the incredible journey so far and as a team we look forward with excitement and anticipation to the next chapter," said Gerrit.



And now, for the next 10 years

The Z factor

Most of the selected group setting PALS in motion in 2014 are, or were, part of the Baby Boomers or a bit of Generation X. People born between 1946 – 64 and 1965 – 80 respectively. Statistics show that the average age of a South African farmer today is 63, but if agriculture in the future wants to survive, this needs to change. And agriculture needs to survive. Without food we're all finished. PALS is gearing up to help make it happen.

How? By adding the Zoomers to the Boomers. Born between 1997 – 2015, the Zoomers, or Generation Z represents the future leaders of the world, the country and most importantly, agriculture.

The tone of voice of Brand PALS will be aimed at them, the future. The younger generations, spearheaded by Generation Z, representing 27.5 million South Africans (almost half of the population) born between 1997 – 2015, applying their own unique perspective on the world. These guys don't live with the bygone baggage of the Baby Boomers. An increase in political awareness has led Gen Z to being one of the most vocal and active generations on social justice that drives change. PALS can drive social change by meeting Gen Z where they are.

It is important that most all of Gen Z want to make sure or be assured that there will always be good food on the table.

Zoomers have a rising demand for corporate social responsibility. They know they have to inhabit this earth for a long time to come and thus are prepared to make it work. And they need to know PALS is their pal to go into the future. Therefore a lot of focus and effort are going into creating young ambassadors for PALS.

It's already happening on school level and at tertiary institutions (read story on page 13). It's not important that, pro rata, a small portion of the Zoomers will end up directly in agriculture, it is important that most all of Gen Z want to make sure or be assured that there will always be good food on the table.

So, over the next decade PALS' communication needs to swing more toward the consumer. The main message being that farms operating in a PALS partnership are the real deal. The desire is to eventually get consumers to seek out branded PALS products when shopping. This will be the strongest motivator for farmers to join the PALS (r)evolution.

Establishing PALS with a strong foundation over the past 10 years set the process in motion. Bringing the young guns in over the next 10 years is the key to success. The baton needs to be passed on. Because in 2034 a lot of Baby Boomers will not be part of the process anymore.

But the process can never stop.



What a wineful world

In the September 2021 issue of *Perspective inside PALS* a story ([read it here](#)) was featured about the communal dream of two gentlemen to not only do their bit for agricultural transformation, but to do it in the wine industry.

Although setting it up wasn't a walk in the park, the magic was that the right people and elements to make it happen got together at exactly the right time in the right place. The team then consisted of Mechau Viljoen of Eilandia Plase who just bought the farm Rooilandia, Dan Mosia the designated new-era wine farmer, Robertson Winery under the watchful eye of Bowen Botha who was the MD and cellar master for more than 40 years before he retired and PALS, the glue putting it all together. Ockert Augustyn and Mechau's son Andries are now also full-fledged members of the team.

The project started in 2014, PALS became involved two years later and in the latter part of 2021 the pieces all fell in place. A 910 ha portion of Korhaanshoogte was registered as Rockbelt Ridge in the name of Dan Mosia. PALS established the farming company, Rockbelt Ridge Agri with Dan and Mechau as directors.

To make it an even stronger set-up Robertson Winery and Mechau donated shares in the winery to the farm. Robertson Winery allocated 600 tonnes production rights to Rockbelt Ridge. The first wine was bottled in 2022. Robertson Co-op's winemakers make the wine and Robertson Winery does the bottling. Bowen is the mentor of the overall process, right down to establishing the Rockbelt Ridge brand as far and wide as possible. It's already available in Makro, approved for listing in Shoprite/Checkers, as well as selected Spar Tops outlets and in a range of

independent liquor stores in South Africa as well as selected restaurants in Gauteng. Perdeberg Liquors handles the distribution.

“I am rather encouraged with what we’ve done so far. It was quite a challenge to begin penetrating the market. It’s a chicken and egg situation. You must have a brand before you can get on the shelf, but you need to get on the shelf to build a brand! However, we are getting there, slowly building our brand,” Dan explains.

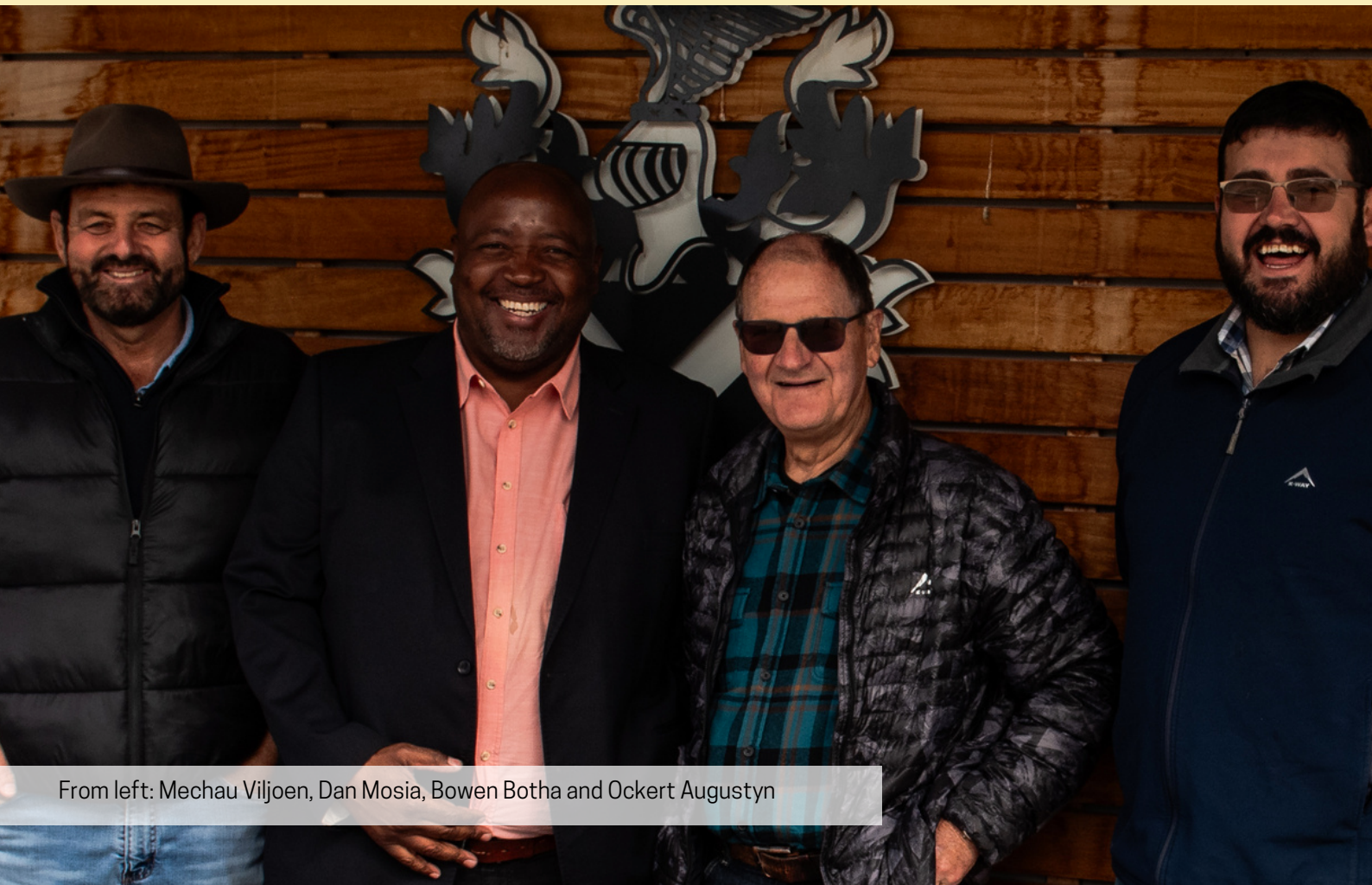
The rich, red, limestone-based soils underlying the vineyards at Rockbelt Ridge are what makes the farm in the Robertson Wine Valley so special. The soils found there are perfectly matched to grape growing, giving the fruit an individual character that is distinctly Rockbelt Ridge, ensuring wines unique and delicious in flavour.

At present they are producing 1 700 cases of the Rockbelt Ridge range made up of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, pinotage, shiraz, a red blend, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, chenin blanc and the Rockbelt Ridge Brut MCC. To find out more, visit www.rockbeltridge.co.za.

In 2014 there was a desire from a small team of dreamers to do something unique, real and respectable, making a difference. They pulled the cork on the dream and turned it into reality. In just one decade. Let’s toast to that.

I see skies of blue
And clouds of white
The bright blessed day
The dark sacred night
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world ...

“It’s a chicken and egg situation. You must have a brand before you can get on the shelf, but you need to get on the shelf to build a brand! However, we are getting there, slowly building our brand.” — Dan Mosia



From left: Mechau Viljoen, Dan Mosia, Bowen Botha and Ockert Augustyn



The heartbeat of farming

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GROWING TOGETHER



From left: Ockert Augustyn, Dan Mosia, Bowen Botha, Mechau and Andries Viljoen

The Ridge that guards the grapes

A new 15 ha table-grape vineyard has recently been planted on Rockbelt Ridge just outside Robertson. Why? Because this is true export table-grape country. Ask their neighbours, the Karsten Group who made table grapes on the Orange River in the Northern Cape famous, just how good this soil is. Everybody agrees, it's the best soil for table grapes in the Western Cape. The vineyard lies in the protective basin formed by the ridge that gave the farm its name, Rockbelt Ridge, embracing the young, freshly planted shoots.

As the soil has been dormant for almost a decade, Mechau, the mentor, advised that Saia oats should be planted as ground cover between the rows as mulch to help moisturise the soil around the young shoots. They are uprooted and placed around the shoots with their roots facing north to ensure the southeaster doesn't blow them away. Drip irrigation on them ensures that the shoots don't get thirsty.



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The chosen cultivars are Sweet Globe and Sweet Celebration and the first grapes will be harvested in 2026. A milestone indeed. Especially if you consider that the project to establish Rockbelt Ridge as a new-era farm started in 2014. A dozen years is a long time. But perseverance, grit and a will to make something happen work wonders.

In 2016 PALS got involved, building the structure between Mechau Viljoen, Dan Mosia and a farming company to get the new-era project going. With meticulous patience and good footwork the structure was put in place in 2021. Hortfin, Nedbank and the Jobs Fund got on board in 2022/3 to add more strength to the project. The realisation of this table grape farm not only meant more produce, but more job opportunities.

Although Rockbelt Ridge has a water allocation for 130 ha, the plan is to increase the table grape production to 40 ha in the future. After that another 40 ha will be allocated to wine grapes, as this is where the partnership between Mechau and Dan began. And then to see how well it goes and how to use the remaining water. Successful farming is a game of patience. Table grapes for the export market runs at high stakes and getting it out there is key. Fortunately their neighbours, the Karsten Group, do their marketing, ensuring the grapes will go to the right destinations. As long as the quality is prima. Which it will be. Everything is in place. Even nets. The stage is set.

And the backdrop is Rockbelt Ridge, the guardian angel of the grapes.





The house on the rock

The biblical parable of “the wise man who built his house on the rock” withstanding floods and winds, comes to mind when the many land reform failures are reported about in national media.

When PALS was launched, it elected to make a radical departure from previous land reform models. Avoiding the mistakes of failed policies and using best business and legal practices for its design was the PALS pathway. This strategy was recently affirmed by the Independent Evaluation of PALS by Palmer Development Group (PDG), a multi-disciplinary consulting firm, on instruction of the Western Cape Government’s Department of Agriculture.

The evaluation found that the PALS initiative is unique, relevant, based on a sound design and framework and addresses the fundamentals regarding critical success factors. More importantly was the finding that PALS projects have a better structural and interpersonal foundation and benefit from a wide range of support and capacity development.

PALS developed and refined its intellectual property and processes to ensure that the “house” (new developmental enterprise) is built on rock.

Quality over quantity. The PALS phases of initiation, planning, motivation and only then, implementation, were tested and refined in many engagements and projects over the last decade.

Beneficiary selection via objective criteria and the PALS screening policy as well as a pairing process via robust engagements regarding values, dreams and fears are part and parcel of the initiation process. Similarly the “what if” questions, dispute resolution and the exit strategy are addressed in the legal framework. The sustainability of the new PALS enterprise, its goals and protecting the rights of the shareholders, are further PALS characteristics.

It is all about the right solid foundation. Unfortunately, many government and other developmental projects are still trying to reinvent the wheel. Most failures can be avoided if the PALS principle of the right foundation and using the right builders, are more widely accepted.

In the apt words of Afrikaans poet HA Fagan:

*Ek hoor dan maar die storm daarbuite
Ek hoor hoe ruk die winde aan my ruite
Kom nag, kom weer en wind, kom oseaan
Dit is 'n rots waarop my huisie staan.*

News in short

PALS progress in a nutshell



Nedbank / PALS Q3 meeting

The Quarter 3 meeting between PALS and Nedbank was recently held, which focused on the progress with the partnership, implementation of new PALS enterprises, roll-out of Nedbank funded “Next Level” training, as well as expansions plans to other regions.



Agrimark / PALS MOU conclusion

Agrimark visited PALS to finalize the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and collaboration between PALS and Agrimark. The team also visited PALS projects around Ceres, to understand how PALS enterprises operate, and to identify possible opportunities for collaboration and specific project support. Amongst the projects visited and engagements done with project participants, were La Vouere Stonefruit, Thembelitsha, Nduli Piggery, and Ikamvalethu Tunnel Farming.

NAMPO Cape 2024

Lennox Plaatjies, Gerrit van Vuuren and Raymond Koopstad visited NAMPO Cape and engaged with various key PALS partners, such as Nedbank, *Landbouweekblad*, Food for Mzansi, and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture. It was also an opportunity to introduce Raymond Koopstad as the newly appointed PALS Ambassador to the various partners. The PALS team also had a brief engagement with the DG of DALRRD, Mr Mooketsa Ramasodi, on progress with the outstanding matters between PALS and DALRRD.



Inyaka Waterval, Beestekraal and Diepdrift CPA in Mpumalanga

The AGM took place on 7 September, in support of the compliance process. The next step is to finalise the business plan. Inyaka Waterval CPA appointed Leon Doyer as the project legal advisor.



Productive area visit by Maluti Farming PALS board of directors

On 15 August the board embarked on an insightful area visit to Tweeling in the Free State. This trip was designed to provide the directors with firsthand experience of three ongoing PALS projects, allowing them to engage directly with project members. During the visit, the board members toured the projects, observing their operations and interacting with the teams on the ground. This experience facilitated meaningful discussions about the challenges and successes of each project, leading to constructive insights on how to enhance their effectiveness and ensure long-term sustainability.



From left: Tsolo Mopeli, Wessel Bibbey, Jessica Maroga, Dr Moeti Motloun, Coenraad Fick, Merriam Phungwayo, Sizwe Nhlapo, Reginald Kambule and Ben Greyling

Yard Indaba

MPU PALS has been asked to form part of the YARD Indaba planning committee. The first committee meeting took place on 9 September. The participants included Land Bank's Farmer Support Program, Re-Agri, John Deere, IUCMA (Usuthu Catchment Management Agency), APAC (Agricultural Produce Agent Council), Mpumalanga Fresh Produce Market, National Youth Development Agency and Mthimba TVET College for student support. The Indaba will occur on 21 and 22 October under the theme "Walk the Journey". It will focus on sustainable farming, Agro-processing and market-led programs. Mpumalanga PALS will present in the sustainable farming category.

PALS training and capacity support

The PALS in-house training with the Nduli Piggery shareholders is progressing very well. Also receiving training on their shareholders agreement, the team of O2 Fruit were guided regarding their business structures and agreements, as well as the marketing training presented by the Fruit Exporters Producers Forum (FPEP).



"Train the Trainer" evaluation and alignment session

The session with training service providers was held in Prince Alfred's Hamlet on 17 September 2024. The aim was to evaluate the PALS training programmes delivered over the last 10 years, as well as to align objectives and planned outcomes, as part of the PALS training strategy for the next 10 years. Facilitated by Prof Arnold Smit (Stellenbosch Business School) and Joy van Biljon representing KBOS Training Centre.



Raymond Koopstad becomes PALS Ambassador

Raymond Koopstad, an experienced and well-known PALS producer and former Witzenberg PALS Board Chairman, has recently being appointed as PALS Ambassador to represent PALS as mentor and member of the PALS engagement and negotiations team. Raymond is a commercial stone fruit farmer, who specializes in producing nectarines for the export market in his PALS enterprise La Vouere Stonefruit, outside Ceres.





PALS Board Chairperson, Dr Heinrich Jantjies ordained as priest

Dr Heinrich Jantjies has been ordained as priest for the congregation of the St. Matthew Anglican Church of Bella Vista, Ceres. His Ordination Service took place on Saturday, 14 September in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, with his first Holy Communion Service on Sunday, 15 September in Bella Vista, Ceres. The PALS boards of SA and Witzenberg extend their congratulations to Reverend Dr Heinrich Jantjies, his family and the St. Matthew congregation for his milestone achievement in service of the community.



Agri Mpumalanga – leadership in agriculture event

Mpumalanga PALS attended the Special Breakfast Event for Leaders in Agriculture hosted by Agri Mpumalanga on 6 September. Lion du Plessis, the newly appointed president of Agri Mpumalanga, opened the event and important figureheads such as the CEO of Agri SA, Johann Kotze and Prof Theuns Eloff addressed the mega farmers invited. Mr Kotze discussed world population growth and its impact on food security, environmental sustainability, climate change, organic growth and essential industries. He further focused on the African continent in terms of self-sufficiency vs. being a net importer and small-scale farming. Prof Theuns Eloff gave an overview of the political landscape after the 2024 elections and unpacked the consequences and outlook of agriculture post-election. He presented an in-depth look at the dynamics of the Government of National Unity, the potential hurdles and the role that agriculture will play in the economy. The final question was: “Has the GNU born fruit, or has it only produced buds?”



PALS presentation to WC Agri and Mpumalanga Agri

PALS National Liaison Officer delivered a PALS presentation to a joint sitting of the provincial agricultural departments of Western Cape and Mpumalanga on 5 September. Presentation focused on introduction of the PALS initiative, co-operation with Department of Agriculture Western Cape, as well as the recent independent evaluation of PALS by PDG, highlighting the impact of PALS as an enabling force for sustainable inclusive growth.

SA Rugby legend and UFS PhD students visit PALS

Western Province and Springbok rugby legend of the 80's Carel du Plessis, famously known as the “Prince of Wings” visited PALS to learn more about the initiative and to discuss ideas around sustainable food security solutions in the country. PhD students from the University of Free State (UFS), Kirsty Greene and Helen van der Merwe also visited the PALS Centre to learn more about the initiative and its impact on the development of small-scale farmers towards sustainability and integration in the food system.



Ikamvalethu Farming delivers good harvest

The Ikamvalethu Tunnel Farming group recently celebrated harvesting a bumper cabbage crop of 24 tons (4 586 cabbages), which also created five local jobs. PALS supported the group with seed funding, as part of the job creation drive of the PALS Jobs Fund programme. The commitment demonstrated by the Ikamvalethu tunnel farmers is a visual manifestation of where there is a will, there is a way.



The future belongs to the youth

PALS emphatically believes in the power of the youth. They might not know as much as the old hands know, but they must be there to lend a hand soon. To do so they need to be empowered with knowledge and know-how, hence the official launch of the PALS Youth Ambassador's Program was on Friday, 13 September 2024. And it was not an unlucky Friday the 13th.

Four local schools within the Witzenberg region were selected and requested to each nominate learners to attend the first session. The participating schools are Bella Vista High School, Charlie Hofmeyr High School, Ceres Secondary School and Iingcinga Zethu Secondary School. The first session was attended by 16 learners and four teachers from the respective schools.

The idea behind this session was to provide learners with an introduction to PALS, the team and the Youth Ambassador's Program, with the focus of the first program being on interactive activities.

The PALS team presenting the training consisted of young guns Bulelwa Sandla, Jayden Langeveldt, Petrowene Klaaste and Brittney Jacobs. Lennox Plaatjies, Raymond Koopstad and Gerrit van Vuuren also attended the event and provided additional information and insight.

"Becoming a PALS Youth Ambassador has been one of my proudest moments at PALS. I feel an immense sense of responsibility when it comes to working with the youth of Ceres as there are so many opportunities for our young people within agriculture," comments Jayden Langeveldt, operations administrator at PALS.

The learners were hesitant at first, but quickly came out of their shells. This led to great participation and contribution to a positive learning environment as opposed to one sided talking. Their answers indicated that the training content can be a lot more challenging. They are hungry to learn. Raymond Koopstad suggested a training session in November on his farm. The learners will be able to practically see

the functioning of a successful farm with activities incorporated in the training session.

“It is such a privilege to be part of an initiative that opens doors to the youth. I realised how keen they are to be involved in something that can create opportunities to them. The program is a powerful way to empower young people,” says Petrowene Klaaste, another young gun at PALS.

The same group of learners will be the Ambassadors for the period until the programme is completed. This will allow PALS to identify potential learners and facilitate bursaries opportunities or possible internships at PALS.

Training sessions will occur quarterly. The same group of learners will be the Ambassadors for the period until the programme is completed. This will allow PALS to identify potential learners and facilitate bursaries opportunities or possible internships at PALS. The learners will participate in community projects (e.g. community gardens, growing and selling cash crops, painting crèches, cleaning projects or any other community initiatives). Tasks and assignments will be carefully arranged to not interfere with schoolwork. Sufficient time will be given to complete tasks. The training program is attended voluntarily.

It is phenomenal to see the eagerness and want in the eyes of the young. It's now up to the old folks to show them the ropes and hand over the reigns.

