

# Kwanalu reflects on 20 years of trailblazing transformation in agriculture

The Kwa-Zulu Natal Agricultural union, Kwanalu, marked twenty years at the forefront of agriculture transformation at its annual congress on 7 September 2017, themed *Trailblazers of Transformation*.



Kwanalu Congress 2017 (Image Supplied)

“Looking back over the last 20 years, Kwanalu has positioned itself as the leading union for organised agriculture in KZN and leads the way nationally as a fully integrated, transformed and relevant organisation,” said Kwanalu CEO, Sandy La Marque, who has been at the helm of the organisation since 2001.

Setting out her vision for the future, La Marque added: “The opportunity for the next 20 years is for Kwanalu and its members to continue being progressive, have sound policy positions, stand united and collectively work at raising the voice of agriculture in KZN and further afield.”

Andy Buchan, in his second year as Kwanalu president credited Kwanalu’s success to “its principled approach to represent the collective interests of its members, and the pivotal role the past leaders have played in shaping Kwanalu into the credible organisation it epitomises today.”

## Change is necessary

Talking about land reform, Buchan stressed that change is necessary. “The objective of land reform must be to produce self-sufficient farmers capable of contributing to food security of their families, communities and ultimately to the economy at large. Kwanalu and its affiliates recognise the need for land reform, but the simple acquisition of land without the necessary support to sustain a living, is degenerative and doomed for failure,” said Buchan. Encouraging Kwanalu members and farmers, in general, to make a positive difference to South Africa as a whole, Buchan concluded: “The strength of Kwanalu, and organised agriculture, is the combined efforts of each individual.”

Award-winning journalist, anti-apartheid activist and political commentator, Max du Preez addressed delegates as the “custodians of our soil and producers of our food.” Speaking at length on land reform, Du Preez recognised that land displacement in SA is a historic fact and an emotional issue driven by pride, arguing that it is not about agriculture in the first place. For that reason, he stressed that an aggressive approach to government about land reform will only “backfire” on the agricultural industry, encouraging instead more talking and more strategising as a solution. Du Preez added that the modern definition of land ownership has shifted away from being a status symbol and is now about producing food and providing employment.

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Farming has become a business – there is no place for emotion or nostalgia anymore,” Du Preez said.

Agri SA President, Johannes Moller who also addressed Congress, committed to renewing AgriSA’s focus on implementing policies, facilitating change and ensuring transformation is implemented, in a sustainable manner, to ensure food security is a top priority.

## 2017 Kwanalu KZN Young Farmer of the Year



Young Farmer of the Year 2017 (Image Supplied)

Further cause for celebration at this year’s Congress was the announcement of the 2017 Kwanalu KZN Young Farmer of the Year. 38-year old golden kiwifruit farmer from Richmond, Ross Lowe, beat off stiff competition to take this year’s title and will now go on to represent the province at the national Toyota SA/Agri SA Young Farmer of the Year 2017 taking place in October.

As a young farmer, Lowe is blazing his own trail in agriculture by farming golden kiwifruit - a relatively unknown commercial farming commodity in the South African market. As such he has had to learn everything from scratch through extensive research.

On his win and on the future of farming in South Africa, Lowe said: “The role of a young farmer in our economy is of huge importance in South Africa. We are the future of our country’s food security and safety and as the custodians of our land, we have to look after and cherish it for future generations. With no food, our economy will not flourish.”

As for why Lowe chose the golden variety of the kiwifruit as opposed to its greener counterpart which South Africans are more familiar with, he believes they are sweeter, tastier and have huge potential in the local market as a result of their superior nutritional qualities. Additionally, there is 30-50% higher yield of fruit in comparison to the green variety so, commercially, it makes more sense, explains Lowe.

Lowe is also committed to sustainable farming practices and contributing to the country's long-term stability through agriculture which is another reason he decided to farm the golden kiwifruit. "Land is such a precious commodity in our country and farming kiwifruit requires only a small piece of land to yield a relatively high return." A high-value crop such as the golden kiwifruit also means the potential to increase wages for all staff on the farm.

A firm believer in the role organised agriculture plays in supporting farmers and the agricultural industry as a whole, Lowe is involved in his local farmers association and helped establish the Southern Kiwi Growers Association about a year ago. Still in its early stages, the association not only represents the best interests of kiwifruit farmers in KZN but also acts as a forum for its members to pool ideas, share knowledge and best-practices.

"We are always blown away by the calibre of entries we receive for the Kwanalu KZN Young Farmer of the Year competition and this year has been no different. It is encouraging to see our young farmers so involved and passionate about agriculture and farming in the province," said La Marque on the announcement of the title.

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