Agricultural Writers SA honours agricultural excellence at 2026 National Awards

AVIANTO, MULDERSDRIFT – 13 November 2026 – Agricultural Writers South Africa (AWSA) celebrated the people shaping the future of South African agriculture at its annual National Awards evening, held at Avianto in Muldersdrift on Friday, 13 November 2026.

The prestigious event, made possible by Hollard, Syngenta, Nedbank, Case IH, CropLife SA, RSA Group, AGDA, Van Loveren and Obaro, brought together leaders from across the agricultural sector. Guests included farmers, agricultural professionals, agribusiness representatives, researchers and communicators, to recognise outstanding achievement, innovation and dedication in agriculture and agricultural communication.

The awards recognise excellence across the agricultural value chain, from established commercial farmers and emerging agricultural entrepreneurs to professionals whose expertise contributes to the advancement of the sector, as well as communicators who ensure that the stories, challenges and opportunities of agriculture reach a wider audience.

Lindi Botha, chairperson of Agricultural Writers SA, said the awards recognise not only the achievements of individuals, but also the thinking, commitment and hard work behind their success.

"Agriculture is shaped by people who are prepared to make difficult decisions, adapt to changing circumstances and take responsibility for the future of their businesses and the sector. These awards recognise that contribution, whether it comes from an established farmer, someone entering commercial agriculture, an agricultural professional or an agricultural communicator telling the stories behind the industry.

"By sharing knowledge, recognising good practice and giving a platform to people who are making a difference, agricultural communication helps create an environment in which the sector can learn from its successes, confront its shortcomings and continually strive for greater excellence," Botha said.

Andries Wiese, Head of Agriculture at Hollard, the evening's main sponsor, said recognising agricultural achievement was important in celebrating the people whose contributions makes industry progress possible.

"Celebrating agricultural achievement matters because it acknowledges the knowledge, skill, innovation and determination that moves South Africa forward," Wiese said.

The 2026 Winners

Farmer of the Year 2026: Willem Groothof

The Farmer of the Year award went to Willem Groothof, a third-generation grain, cattle and game farmer from the Springbokvlakte in Limpopo.

Groothof's farming philosophy is deeply rooted in his faith and his conviction that technology holds the answer to many of the challenges facing modern farmers. He believes in remaining at the forefront of technological development and applying innovation to address production and climate-related challenges.

However, technology is only one part of his approach. Groothof places considerable emphasis on research and evaluation throughout the farming business, believing that decisions should be supported by sound information and practical assessment.

He is also a firm believer in flexibility, recognising that changing circumstances sometimes require a business to adapt and shift direction. His approach is underpinned by a commitment to sustainable agricultural practices and meaningful community involvement.

New Entrant to Commercial Agriculture 2026: Angelo Marman

Angelo Marman, who runs Abitz Farming, an organic farming venture in Chatsworth in the Western Cape, was presented with the New Entrant to Commercial Agriculture award.

Marman has built a growing market for his organic produce, securing supply relationships with companies such as Metro Organics, Real Fresh and an organic dog food brand.

As demand for his produce has increased, he has recognised the value of collaboration. By partnering with other small-scale and commercial producers in the region, Marman has developed a coordinated supply approach that includes managing logistics to meet collective market requirements.

His business demonstrates how entrepreneurship, market development and collaboration can create opportunities for smaller agricultural enterprises to participate in established value chains.

Agriculturalist of the Year 2026: Jade Smith

Jade Smith, an agricultural economist at Absa AgriBusiness, was announced as the Agriculturalist of the Year.

Smith analyses agricultural trends, commodity markets and macroeconomic developments to provide insight into the factors shaping South Africa's farming sector. Her work helps translate complex economic information into accessible, timely intelligence that producers can use when making business decisions.

She has also contributed to agricultural development through her support of developing dairy farmers and her work as a tutor to agricultural economics students.

Her appointment at Absa has broadened her field of work beyond dairy to include livestock, grain, horticulture and the wider agricultural economy. Her recognition reflects the importance of sound economic analysis and accessible information in helping farmers navigate an increasingly complex business environment.

Excellence in agricultural communication
Agricultural communication remains central to building understanding of the sector and ensuring that the knowledge, experiences and achievements of those working in agriculture are shared across the industry and beyond.

The 2026 member competitions recognised AWSA members who excel in communicating important agricultural issues, translating complex technical information and bringing compelling stories about the industry to their audiences.

In the **FNB Communicator of the Year Awards**, Elriza Theron received top honours in the Print Media category, while Thabi Modutoane took the top spot in the Broadcast Media category. Cobus du Plessis received the award in the Business Management category, and Octavia Spandiel was named Youth Communicator of the Year. The **FNB Communicator of the Year Awards** celebrate agricultural communicators who make important contributions to informing farmers, agribusinesses, related industries and the public about developments shaping the sector.

In the **Japie Grobler Technical and Investigative Article Awards**, Alani Janeke received the award for Investigative Journalism. This award recognises in-depth reporting that sheds light on important issues affecting agriculture, including their social, economic, environmental and political implications, as well as matters relating to trade, policy and malpractice within the industry. Glenneis Kriel was the winner in the Technical Article category. This category celebrates journalists who make complex agricultural subjects, such as mechanisation, technology and finance, accessible and understandable to a wider audience.

In the **CropLife SA Crop Protection Article Award**, Dewald Kirsten was named the 2026 winner for his outstanding contribution to agricultural crop protection reporting. The Croplife SA award recognises articles that contribute to a better understanding of crop protection, including innovation, responsible use, stewardship, biotechnology and the regulatory environment. It highlights the important role of informed agricultural journalism in communicating developments in crop protection and promoting responsible practices across the industry.

Dewald Kirsten also received recognition in the **BKB Photography Competition**, celebrating the contribution of agricultural photography in capturing the people, practices and landscapes that define South African agriculture. He was both announced as the BKB Agricultural Photographer of the Year and entered the BKB Agricultural Photograph of the Year.

Global Community of Ag Writers

Agricultural Writers SA's contribution to agricultural communication extends beyond South Africa's borders through its active participation in the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ). As part of this global network, AWSA members engage with agricultural journalists and communicators from around the world, sharing knowledge, exchanging ideas and building international relationships that strengthen agricultural reporting.

This international involvement will reach an important milestone in September 2027, when South Africa hosts the IFAJ World Congress. This global event coincides with the 50th anniversary of AWSA. The event will bring agricultural journalists and communicators from across the globe to South Africa, providing an opportunity to showcase the country's diverse agricultural sector, share its stories and challenges, and strengthen connections between local and international agricultural media.

For AWSA, hosting the congress represents an opportunity to put South African agriculture and its communicators on the global stage, while contributing to the international conversation about the future of food production, farming and agricultural communication.

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