

Mark Hardy named Agriculturalist of the Year 2007

One of the most prestigious awards in the agricultural fraternity was recently awarded to Dr. Mark Hardy at the gala dinner event of the SA Agricultural Writers Association on the 12th of October.

Dr. Hardy, Past President of the GSSA, is an Agricultural Scientist in the Plant Production Institute of the Department of Agriculture Western Cape. He is recognized as one of the leading grassland scientists in the country and has gained recognition as a specialist in cropping systems research in the Western Cape Province over the past 10 years. He has published widely, both in the scientific and popular media, contributing to 12 book chapters published both locally and internationally, 50 papers published in national and international scientific journals and congress proceedings, 13 technical

articles and 43 articles in the popular press. During his career, he has been invited to address numerous international and national scientific symposia and congresses. In addition, he has presented numerous scientific papers and posters at national and international conferences, chaired numerous sessions at such conferences, and has played an integral part in organizing scientific sessions at congresses and symposia.



He served as President of the GSSA in 2007, and has served on the Council in various capacities. He is also a Council member of the Cape Crop Production Forum (formally the Cape Cereal Development Association) and serves on the Advisory Board of the Western Cape Animal Production Research Trust.

His core responsibility is to manage the Department's

“Sustainable dry-land cropping systems for the Western Cape” research programme. He has been highly successful in this task and has attracted substantial funding from the private sector (the Winter Cereal Trust and the Protein Research Foundation) in support of these research efforts. He leads projects investigating sustainability of crop rotation systems; effects of tillage practices within crop rotations on soil health and productivity; economics of crop rotation; seed bank studies and sustainability of annual legume pastures in crop/pasture rotations; and fertility requirements of irrigated temperate and sub-tropical pastures.

His multi-disciplinary approach to his research is highly acclaimed, and he adds value to his own research results by also adding the economic analysis of his results to the total output of his research.

He works with several other research organisations on “value adding” research projects within the framework created by his long-term, large-scale crop rotation experimental sites.

His research programme has led to several important results for the farming community. For example, crop rotation systems which include legumes and wheat are more economical than wheat monocultures; farmers can buffer the effect of drought conditions by distributing the risk between crops; wheat planted after legumes resulted in 30

– 35% higher production than wheat planted after wheat; and effective weed control was obtained by rotating wheat with canola and lupins.

Dr. Hardy's value to agriculture has been clearly demonstrated in the Southern Cape. He is a highly respected researcher who carries his scientific results through the farm gate clearly and concisely, indirectly influencing the sustainability of farming practices in these areas.

His value has also been acknowledged at various occasions, and has also resulted in him receiving the prestigious Protein Research Foundation award in 2004. His special way of interacting with farmers and agricultural companies has resulted in extremely valuable research partnerships to the benefit of both the research fraternity and the farming communities in the Swartland and Southern Cape.

The uniqueness of his research approach culminates in the way in which he involves farmers in his research – in this way the farmers also take ownership in developing new cutting-edge technology to the benefit of their respective farming practices.

