The Sansor-Bayer "Science for a Better Life Award" bestowed on Dr Wayne Truter

Press Release

"Inside that tiny seed lives the roots, branches, bark, trunk, leaves, twigs and apple fruit of that apple tree. You can't see, feel, hear, taste or smell any of that yet; nevertheless, it is all inside that seed. The moment the seed is in your hand – all of that is in your hand, too, from the root to the bark to the fruit! All you have to do is push the seed into the soil. It is the belief that in a seed, there is a tree. So, believe! To have a seed, is to have everything." by a philosopher C. JoyBell.

Agriculture has been Dr Wayne Truter's passion since he was a little boy helping his father plant their first crop on a small piece of land many years ago. He shared that the smell of turned soil, the sound of rain, the sight of emerging seedlings, and the taste of a freshly buttered "mielie" with the feeling of completeness, enticed each and every one of his senses. That agricultural experience and many more to follow cultivated and sustained his interest in agriculture for life. This interest has kept him busy for the last 20 years in agricultural science, asking new questions, creating new thoughts, researching new ideas, testing new innovations and methodologies to ultimately share new outcomes. The past 10 years of his career, educating and training students at the University of Pretoria, has given him immense satisfaction. The knowledge of and witness to the massive contributions the graduates he have taught and supervised have made in the agricultural fraternity, acknowledge and recognise this passion he shares with and through many others.

The sciences of agriculture are lessons learned from nature, which supports the growth and expansion of life on earth. These past few years he has come to realize that many aspects of life begin with a seed. That seed may be the beginning of a life of an organism (human, animal or plant etc.) as we know it, but can be a thought that can create new ideas, new achievements or new scientific breakthroughs by new upcoming professionals. Not only have he had the opportunity to study the interrelationships between climate, soil, seeds, plants, animals and humans; he have been given the opportunity to work with young upcoming professionals, who are the new seeds of the agricultural fraternity in future. His career has taught him ways to convey the teachings of old and new knowledge, to the young and thought provoking minds that are driven by the accelerated technological advancements and innovations of engineering sciences that dominate our everyday life. Agriculture has had moments of negative connotation in South Africa and other parts of the world, and the glamor of this science has been

masked for many years. He can attest to the fact that once revealed it has proven to have had exceptional benefits indirectly and directly to many people. He says that he truly believes that the growth and development of agricultural sciences, lies in the ability and the passion of a young mind, that learns to nurture a seed, an idea, until it becomes a mature and recognized outcome. He has also learned that respect for an environment and another individual will grow one's mind beyond one's unknown limits.

The science of seed and the industry that revolves around it has provided him and his students with an understanding of the most important building block of life on earth. This science and industry is of major importance and can develop in many ways. In his particular field of expertise, Pasture Science, which is regarded by the Department of Education as one of the top agricultural scare skills in the country, is faced with serious educational and research challenges. These challenges have been discussed over the past couple of years in and amongst professional bodies, and actions taken have led to strategies to reduce the impact of the fading expertise in Pasture Science. It has been deducted that one of the reasons for the diminishing expertise and interest in pasture science, is the decline in interest in tertiary programmes that focus on plant breeding, genetics and seed biology just to mention a few. From a research perspective, it has been noted that information is readily available and easily accessible world-wide. First world countries that are leap years ahead with research on various aspects of seed science and other agricultural sciences, provide information that many third world countries use because of a shortage of local capacity and expertise.

This "Adopt and Adapt Syndrome" as he terms it, has often been to the detriment of some who have tried to apply locally untested methodologies. These cases alone, stress the need for locally relevant research, but can only suffice if supported by local industry, and if the importance of the seed industry is made known to young upcoming professionals. Once the passion and enthusiasm of interested students and upcoming professionals is captured, it should be nurtured. The research of technological advancements in seed science is of major importance, especially under variable South African conditions. Efforts to attract the interest of local industry, to support technologically advanced research locally, can often be challenging. Their research team however, has been very successful and the research being conducted and completed to date has provided some insightful outcomes which we regard as a positive impact to the seed industry.

Fundamental scientific research programmes are the main focus of tertiary and research institutions, however, commercial (production) research programmes and crop producer support programmes are scarce and ownerless at times in South Africa. This has resulted in retail companies taking ownership of the challenge, irrespective of the fact that research is not their core business, to ultimately provide some support to the producer.

As principal advisor to Grass SA, the aforementioned need was overwhelmingly identified in the pasture industry and has led to an exciting journey. This journey will focus on linking fundamental research outcomes produced by tertiary and research institutions, to practical implementation programmes and information valued by the producers and producer organizations. This concept was welcomed by the pasture fraternity and has given Grass SA the motivation and opportunity, to institute their first on-farm research station, which will serve the agricultural and in particular the pasture industry in future. In addition to the benefits of such an on-farm research station to pasture producers and organizations, its key objective is to provide graduates and young professionals from tertiary institutions, the opportunity for practical exposure and further mentorship. Through this innovation to achieve these goals, they can have a positive impact on the seed industry as well.

An additional impact on the seed industry is the positive contribution one needs to make to Human Capital Development through training and mentorship as previously mentioned. Human capital in the agricultural fraternity is easier to develop, when the glamour of agriculture and specifically to this industry, the importance of seed science, the magnitude of the seed industry and the impact on the agricultural fraternity is emphasised and marketed appropriately. As part of my efforts to do so, he regards it important to align ourselves as agriculturalists with other advanced disciplines, and by showing that agriculture is "hip", is "cool", is extremely complex and it is a crucial component of our everyday life, we will capture the interest and involvement of upcoming young professionals.

His training and research efforts the past few years, with the abovementioned objectives and aspirations in mind, have been fruitful through local industry support. It has helped to conduct high level research and to ultimately train and graduate numerous highly qualified young professionals who are the future of this industry. His career has fortunately provided him with the opportunity, to achieve the objective of germinating and nurturing the interest of seed science, amongst new students interested in agriculture, and in particular pasture science. It is important that highly qualified and upcoming professionals are trained to build this industry to new heights. For an industry to remain sustainable, it is imperative that professionals in this field have a basic scientific knowledge that can support their developing field and work experience. These attempts have been made possible in various ways and the passionate students identified in the past, mentored on various projects, and who are now the young professionals in industry, are testimony to the positive impacts human capital development can have on the seed industry.

Personally, just this nomination for the award has acknowledged and recognized, that the strategic goals and efforts made to achieve the aforementioned aspirations and objectives, are becoming a reality and it is just the beginning of new life in the agricultural industry as is a seed in soil.

Dr Truter will humbly use the prize money awarded to him to support his initiative of instituting a Young Agricultural Professionals Forum that will engage with all graduates entering or have entered into industry. It is envisaged that this forum will host exclusive evening business and technical seminars, motivational talks etc. It will provide young professionals the opportunity to interact with organizations such as SANSOR, other industry stakeholders and producer organizations and possibly assist them in identifying and meeting mentors.

To achieve some of these aspirations, he would enrol for an accredited life coaching / motivational speakers course, to ultimately equip himself with the knowledge of how to prepare a seminar, that I can present to young professionals in the agricultural fraternity, that attend a relevant conference and/or a proposed meeting of the upcoming Young Agricultural Professionals Forum.