

2022 top potato producer crowned

By Phillip Crafford, Plaas Media

S yngenta and Potatoes SA recently celebrated the efforts and hard work of South Africa's top seed potato growers and potato producers at the Potatoes SA Seed Potato Growers' Forum and Congress, which took place on 21 and 22 September 2022, respectively. The main sponsor of the National Potato Farmer of the Year award, Syngenta SA, in co-operation with Potatoes SA, named Murray Thompson of Anthorn Farming in North West as the 2022 Syngenta National Potato Farmer of the Year. This was the highlight of the congress on the evening of 22 September.

Willie Jacobs, chief executive officer of Potatoes SA, elaborated on the award and its significance for the potato industry. According to Jacobs, determining the top potato producer of the year entailed a scientific selection process after nominations were received from several table potato production areas, market agencies, and the processing industry.

Selecting the cream of the crop

The four main criteria for selection were:

- Efficient use of resources and corresponding documentation of, among others, irrigation management systems and fertiliser strategies.
- Thorough knowledge of marketing and markets, management of pricing, and communication with stakeholders and clients.
- Sustainability, continuity and risk management.
- Financial management such as record-keeping and quality of financial reports.

The judging panel included André Labuschagne, campaign lead of potatoes and subtropical fruit at Syngenta, Loffie Brandt, head of sales enablement at Absa AgriBusiness,



Murray Thompson of Anthorn Farming was named the Syngenta National Potato Farmer of the Year 2022. From the left is Christian Giesel, head of marketing, Syngenta South Africa, Johan Nel, head of production and general manager of Anthorn Farming, André Labuschagne of Syngenta, Willie Jacobs, CEO of Potatoes SA, Sandy and Murray Thompson of Anthorn Farming, Bruce McKenzie, Syngenta, and JF van der Merwe, former chairperson of Potatoes SA.

Nico Wagner, Syngenta National Potato Farmer of the Year 2017, George Barnard, Syngenta National Potato Farmer of the Year 2019, and Dr Johan van Deventer, managing director (Ret) of Freshmark, Shoprite and Checkers' Fresh Produce Sourcing Division.

According to Christian Giesel of Syngenta, the company has been involved in the award since its inception. He added that Syngenta's criteria for the National Potato Farmer of the Year award included progressive agronomy, stewardship, and marketing.

The other finalists for this year's Syngenta National Potato Farmer of the Year award were Albert de Villiers from the Sandveld region, Jaco Nel from Limpopo, and Manie Grové from the Eastern Free State.

Sticking to the basics

For Murray Thompson, winning the award serves as recognition of everything that Anthorn Farming has accomplished over the last ten years. In 2012, Thompson ended his career abroad and took up farming in Christiana, North West, after the untimely passing of his father. He

decided to focus on the potato production component of the farm.

Thompson attributes Anthorn Farming's success to three main pillars. The first is the implementation of a simple business plan, the correct execution of that plan, and not sacrificing basic farming principles for too radical innovations. The second pillar is the assistance of people in the potato industry – everyone within the value chain, and in particular the efficiency and leadership of Johan Nel, head of production and general manager of Anthorn Farming.

Lastly, Anthorn's association with Wesgrow is a major pillar of their farming enterprise. Wesgrow's technical support, plant material quality, and assistance in helping Anthorn Farming meet consumer and industry demands, are praiseworthy and an essential ingredient in the Anthorn success recipe.

Thompson concluded by saying there is no real secret to success when it comes to Anthorn's farming practices – sticking to the basics is what counts. **C**

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