

## **AGRI-EXPO: STRENGTHENING STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION TO ENHANCE INDUSTRY COMPETITIVENESS**

Agri-Expo, established in 1831 as the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society, is South Africa's oldest agricultural society and a leading non-profit institution dedicated to advancing agricultural excellence through collaboration, innovation and market development. Since registering Agri-Expo as its official brand in 1996, the organisation has evolved into a professional promotion and marketing body for the agricultural sector, operating in the interest of its members, agricultural stakeholders, government and the public.

For nearly two centuries, Agri-Expo has played a meaningful role in shaping the agricultural landscape. In a letter marking its 190th anniversary, HRH Princess Anne, President of the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC), acknowledged the organisation's enduring contribution to agriculture and society. This recognition reflects both its legacy and its continued relevance in a rapidly evolving global and local agricultural environment.

Today, Agri-Expo functions as a **gateway to agriculture**, connecting producers, industry bodies, government, academia and consumers through a coordinated, multi-platform institutional ecosystem. Following a strategic repositioning, the organisation has intensified its focus on economic and rural development, agri-processing, youth development and the recognition of excellence. This renewed strategic direction has translated into measurable, sustained impact across the dairy, wine and broader agri-processing sectors.

### **A COLLABORATIVE, SYSTEM-LEVEL INNOVATION MODEL**

Agri-Expo's core innovation lies not in a single product or intervention, but in its ability to **institutionalise collaboration at scale**. Its integrated model connects more than 30 stakeholders across the agricultural value chain, including government departments, industry organisations, financial institutions, producers, technical experts and educational institutions.

Through this model, Agri-Expo delivers:

- Industry benchmarking platforms
- Skills development and knowledge transfer
- Market access and brand visibility
- Youth development pipelines
- International industry integration

This coordinated ecosystem addresses a key structural challenge within agriculture, fragmentation, by aligning stakeholders around shared platforms and outcomes. The result is a system that enables continuous improvement, innovation and competitiveness, while delivering tangible, evidence-based economic outcomes for participating businesses.

### **DRIVING COMPETITIVENESS IN THE DAIRY INDUSTRY**

Agri-Expo's impact is most clearly demonstrated through its longstanding involvement in the dairy sector. The South African Dairy Championships, first held in 1834, is the largest and oldest dairy competition in Africa and a cornerstone of the organisation's contribution to agri-processing excellence.

In 2026, the Championships reached record scale:

- **1 227 product entries**
- **81 producers**
- **130 judges**
- **20 industry partners**

Products are evaluated across approximately 150 classes, spanning cheese, milk, cream, yoghurt, butter, ice cream and fermented products, with new categories introduced in response to evolving market trends.

The Championships provide:

- Independent, expert evaluation through blind tasting
- Benchmarking against national standards
- Detailed technical feedback to producers
- A platform for networking and knowledge exchange

A defining innovation is the **Qualité Mark of Excellence**, introduced by Agri-Expo in 2001. As South Africa's only dairy mark of excellence, it remains the industry's highest accolade and a trusted indicator of quality for consumers, retailers and producers alike.

Over more than two decades, this innovation has demonstrably:

- Elevated product quality across the sector
- Increased consumer awareness and trust
- Enabled incentive schemes and retail opportunities
- Strengthened brand positioning and competitiveness

The commercial impact is measurable. The 2025 Championships generated more than **R8 million in independently verified media exposure** (Novus Media), including print, broadcast and digital coverage. This visibility has contributed directly to increased retail listings, contract opportunities and the emergence of several brands as household names.

The Championships are widely recognised within the industry as a driver of excellence. Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Dr Ivan Meyer, has highlighted their role in building technical expertise, particularly in sensory evaluation, and strengthening the overall competitiveness of the dairy sector.

### **RECOGNISING AND DEVELOPING INDUSTRY TALENT**

Agri-Expo continues to invest in human capital as a key driver of long-term competitiveness. The **Hollard Game Changer Award**, introduced in 2024, recognises exceptional young professionals under the age of 40 who are already making a measurable contribution to the dairy industry. With a cash prize of R50 000, the award incentivises innovation, leadership and excellence. The first recipients, Clement October and Pamella Dzindikwa, have progressed from junior roles to key leadership positions within leading dairy businesses. Their trajectories illustrate how targeted recognition and support can accelerate skills development and strengthen the sector's talent pipeline.

### **EXPANDING AGRI-PROCESSING THROUGH INNOVATION**

Agri-Expo's ability to identify emerging opportunities is reflected in the launch of the **South African Preserve Championships** in 2025. Designed to replicate the proven success of the dairy model, this national platform recognises excellence in fruit and vegetable preserves.

The inaugural Championships attracted:

- **456 entries** - more than double initial expectations
- **66 producers**

With more than 100 classes, from jams and marmalades to chutneys and pestos, the Championships:

- Create new market opportunities
- Encourage product innovation and diversification
- Strengthen small and medium enterprises
- Expand participation in agri-processing

This initiative demonstrates Agri-Expo's ability to transfer and adapt successful models across sectors, reinforcing its role as a catalyst for industry growth.

### **ADVANCING THE WINE INDUSTRY**

Agri-Expo has played a foundational role in the wine industry. It was instrumental in establishing the South African Young Wine Show in 1833, the country's only technical competition for wines of the current vintage, and remains actively involved as patron. With 1 000+ entries annually from eight regions, the competition:

- Provides critical technical feedback to winemakers
- Drives quality improvement across vintages
- Enhances skills and expertise within the industry

Agri-Expo is also associated with the Veritas Awards, South Africa's largest wine competition, further reinforcing its contribution to maintaining and elevating standards within this globally competitive sector.

### **ENABLING MARKET ACCESS AND GLOBAL INTEGRATION**

Agri-Expo plays a strategic role in connecting South African producers to international markets. As the official entry agent for the **World Cheese Awards**, it facilitates participation in the world's largest cheese

competition under the auspices of the Guild of Fine Food. Recognition at this level provides credible third-party validation of product quality and significantly enhances market value. In 2025, South African cheesemakers achieved notable success, highlighting the strength of local expertise.

Agri-Expo's global relevance is further underscored by its longstanding relationship with the **Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC)**. As host of the **2026 Commonwealth Agriculture Conference** in Cape Town – only the second time South Africa hosts the event – Agri-Expo will convene global leaders in agriculture. The conference is expected to:

- Attract international investment
- Strengthen trade relationships
- Showcase the Western Cape's agricultural excellence

### **STRENGTHENING RURAL ECONOMIES AND AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES**

Agri-Expo supports **19 agricultural shows** across the Western and Northern Cape, increasing financial backing by **80% over the past three years**. These shows remain vital platforms for benchmarking, skills development and economic activity in rural areas. Their impact includes:

- Stimulating local economies and tourism
- Generating employment and income opportunities
- Providing training for agricultural workers
- Supporting product and livestock quality improvement
- Strengthening community cohesion

Showgrounds serve as multi-purpose venues, hosting events throughout the year and contributing to the sustainability of rural towns. Through initiatives such as the Agri-Expo Members' Show Meeting, attended by up to 80 delegates, the organisation further strengthens capacity within the agricultural show network.

### **INVESTING IN YOUTH AND FUTURE AGRICULTURAL LEADERS**

Agri-Expo has made a sustained contribution to youth development through its role in establishing the **Western Cape Agricultural Youth Society** and the broader National Youth Show Association. Today:

- More than **1 000 young participants** take part annually
- Programmes are active across multiple regions
- Strong partnerships exist with agricultural schools

These initiatives expose young people to agriculture, develop practical skills, promote entrepreneurship and build career pathways within the sector. Agri-Expo also supports agricultural schools through bursaries, reinforcing its commitment to long-term human capital development.

### **SUSTAINABLE IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

As a non-profit organisation, Agri-Expo operates with a clear mandate to reinvest value into the agricultural sector. Its sustainability is underpinned by:

- A 15-member Council ensuring governance and strategic alignment
- Longstanding credibility and trust within the industry
- Partnerships with more than 30 stakeholders
- Active participation in key industry bodies, including Agri Western Cape and commodity forums

This governance framework ensures accountability, continuity and responsiveness to industry needs.

### **CONCLUSION: A CATALYTIC INSTITUTION WITH ENDURING IMPACT**

Agri-Expo's innovation lies in its ability to connect, coordinate and catalyse across the agricultural value chain. Through its integrated, multi-platform model, it strengthens stakeholder cooperation, enhances competitiveness and delivers measurable economic impact. Its initiatives reach hundreds of businesses annually, support thousands of livelihoods and contribute to the sustainability of rural economies. With more than 190 years of proven impact and a forward-looking strategy, Agri-Expo continues to demonstrate how institutional innovation can drive long-term, system-wide value. In doing so, it not only supports individual businesses, it strengthens the resilience, performance and global competitiveness of the Western Cape agricultural economy as a whole.