

Background: Agri-Expo

Agri-Expo is South Africa's oldest agricultural society, established in 1831 as the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society. In 1996, the organisation registered Agri-Expo as its official marketing brand and today operates as a professional promotion and marketing body for the agricultural sector. Its work is undertaken in the interest of its members, agricultural stakeholders, government and the broader public.

"Agri-Expo has had an impact on many aspects of people's lives since its inception," wrote Her Royal Highness Princess Anne in a letter from Buckingham Palace on the occasion of Agri-Expo's 190th anniversary in 2021, in her capacity as President of the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC).

Renowned for championing diverse initiatives that strengthen South Africa's agricultural economy, Agri-Expo successfully balances legacy with innovation. Following a strategic restructuring in recent years, the organisation has sharpened its focus on economic and rural development, agri-processing, youth development and the recognition of excellence. This renewed strategy has delivered measurable results, reinforcing both its sustainability and relevance.

Agri-Expo's core focus areas, wine, dairy, youth development and sustainable agricultural shows, underscore its commitment to advancing agri-processing and supporting industry growth.

The organisation played a key role in establishing South Africa's first wine show, the South African Young Wine Show, dating back to 1833, as well as the country's largest wine competition, the Veritas Awards. As owner and patron of the SA Young Wine Show, Agri-Expo remains actively involved. This is the only technical competition in South Africa for wines of the current vintage and has, over time, made a significant contribution to improving the average quality of South African wines and the expertise of local winemakers. The competition attracts approximately 1 000 entries annually from eight participating regions and is judged by panels of experts who provide constructive feedback. The prestige associated with the awards, including 19 trophies, serves as a strong incentive for producers to strive for excellence.

Agricultural shows continue to play a vital role in stimulating agriculture and local economies, particularly in rural areas. Agri-Expo supports 19 agricultural shows across the Western and Northern Cape and has increased its financial backing by 80% over the past three years. These shows showcase high-quality agricultural products and host a range of national, provincial and regional championships. Beyond benchmarking excellence, they contribute to local economic development, support tourism, create employment opportunities and foster community cohesion. Showgrounds also serve as multi-purpose venues throughout the year, hosting additional events and, in some cases, international gatherings. Agri-Expo also supports initiatives such as the Western Cape Poultry Club, contributing to the preservation of breed standards.

A key initiative is the annual Agri-Expo Members' Show Meeting, which focuses on training and development for agricultural show representatives. Attended by up to 80 delegates from across the Western and Northern Cape, the meeting provides a platform for knowledge exchange, industry insights and the sharing of best practices. Agri-Expo also recognises excellence within the show sector through awards in categories such as Innovation, Quality Presentation, New Entrant Development, Community Involvement and Youth Development, as well as lifetime achievement awards.

Agri-Expo has played a leading role in youth development in agriculture. In 1999, it contributed to the establishment of the National Youth Show Association, following the introduction of youth shows in the Western Cape. These initiatives aim to encourage young people to engage with agriculture, develop life skills and explore career opportunities in the sector. The Western Cape Agricultural Youth Society, established with Agri-Expo as a founding member, operates as an independent body with representation from regional shows and agricultural schools. Today, the youth programme includes more than 1 000 participants across approximately eight regional shows. Agri-Expo continues to support this programme financially and acts as a link between the Western Cape Department of Agriculture and the youth structures. It also sponsors initiatives such as the annual Stockman Competition.

In addition, Agri-Expo maintains longstanding partnerships with agricultural schools in the Western Cape, awarding bursaries to high-performing learners and supporting the development of future agricultural professionals.

Agri-Expo is actively involved in the Western Cape Prestige Agricultural Awards, in partnership with the Western Cape Department of Agriculture and other stakeholders. Through its sponsorship of the Agri-Expo Award for Best Potential, the organisation contributes to recognising emerging talent and encouraging excellence within the sector.

The organisation has been closely involved in the South African dairy industry since 1834, when the first South African Dairy Championships were held. Today, the Championships remain the largest and oldest dairy competition in Africa. The 2026 edition marked a record-breaking year, with 1 227 entries from 81 producers, evaluated by 130 judges and supported by 20 industry partners. The competition includes approximately 150 classes across a wide range of dairy products and continues to evolve with the introduction of new categories.

A key innovation is the Qualité Mark of Excellence, introduced in 2001 as South Africa's only mark of excellence for dairy products. It remains the industry's highest accolade and has contributed significantly to improving product quality, creating marketing opportunities and increasing consumer awareness.

Agri-Expo also introduced the Hollard Game Changer Award in 2024 to recognise exceptional young talent in the dairy industry. The award, which includes a R50 000 cash prize, highlights individuals under 40 who are making meaningful contributions to the sector and supports the development of future industry leaders.

Since 2025, Agri-Expo has served as the official entry agent for South African cheesemakers to the World Cheese Awards, the world's largest cheese competition. This provides local producers with access to international markets and recognition. South African success at this level, including awards for producers such as Dalewood Fromage, highlights the strength of the local industry.

Agri-Expo's commitment to skills development is further reflected in historical initiatives such as the Burgundy Cheesemaking Fellowship (2005–2014), which enabled 38 junior cheesemakers, many from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, to receive international training. Many of these individuals now hold leadership positions within the industry.

The organisation's latest initiative, the South African Preserve Championships, was launched in 2025 to provide a national platform for excellence in fruit and vegetable

preserves. The inaugural event attracted 456 entries from 66 producers, exceeding expectations and demonstrating strong demand for such a platform.

Agri-Expo is also set to host the 31st Commonwealth Agriculture Conference in Cape Town in 2026, under the auspices of the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth. This prestigious global event will bring together agricultural leaders from across the Commonwealth and further position the Western Cape as a centre of agricultural excellence and innovation.

As a non-profit organisation, Agri-Expo operates as a gateway to agriculture, fulfilling its mandate through strong partnerships and stakeholder collaboration. With a Council of 15 members providing governance and strategic oversight, the organisation remains committed to its legacy of excellence while ensuring continued relevance and impact.

Agri-Expo is a proud member of organised agriculture and actively contributes to industry structures, including Agri Western Cape, the Commodity Chamber and the Western Cape Animal Health Forum. It also works closely with key industry bodies such as Milk South Africa, the Milk Producers' Organisation and Hortgro, ensuring alignment with industry priorities and maintaining its role as a credible and influential stakeholder.