



PRESS RELEASE

Iconic SA table grape grower Aat Hoekstra passes away

25 January 2022 – Iconic South African table grape grower Aat Hoekstra (91), from the Hoekstra Fruit Farms group in the Paarl, passed away in his sleep on Sunday evening 23 January 2022. The South African Table Grape Industry (SATI) recognised Hoekstra, or Oom (Uncle) Aat as he was affectionately known, as one of eight pioneers who made a huge impact on the industry in its over 125-year history.

The SATI Board, Management as well as all producers express our sincere condolences to Hoekstra's daughters Maleen and Annett, the Hoekstra Fruit Farm group management, the thousands of workers on their farms and export business.

Oom Aat arrived in South Africa from the Netherlands with 10 pounds in his pocket decades ago, learned the finer skills of the table grape business from legendary Paarl grower, the late Jan Kirsten. Hoekstra's gradual building of his business in the Paarl region, later incorporating not only the best practices in table grape growing, but also extending to cold storage operations and international marketing, were visionary.

The orange, blue and white colours of the Hoekstra fruit branded boxes are known the world over. He also founded a table grape breeding initiative which included bringing some of the best new international varieties to the country. Prime Seedless and Starlight are the most well know cultivars that have been commercialised by Hoekstra in South Africa. This quest is continuing today with more than 100 new cultivars from the Volcani Research Organisation in Israel being tested and evaluated on Hoekstra's farms through his involvement in the company Plant Genetics of which he is a shareholder.

According to Willem Bestbier, retired SATI CEO, Oom Aat is a "true industry pioneer" who not only focused on building a successful business, but he actively supported industry initiatives. "We salute him for the great impact he made in improving the SA table grape industry."

Hoekstra's legacy as a person and his contribution to the South African table grape industry has been monumental and has been recognised by organised agriculture and other industry bodies through the bestowment of various industry awards and tokens of recognition.

Oom Aat will be sorely missed. His quest for quality and excellence will continue to enthuse and motivate us and the entire South African table grape industry.

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