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MEDIA RELEASE

A new grain generation placed under the spotlight

Human-centred leadership in the grain industry was the focus of GOSA's 41st symposium this year. In line with the overarching theme, "A new grain generation in the making", leading speakers took part in the discussion on the essential need for empowered and effective personnel to take the local grain industry into the future.

"The value of GOSA as a leading platform that brings together role players from across the grain value chain for knowledge-sharing, networking and discussions about the future of the industry has once again been confirmed," said Johan van Rensburg, president of GOSA, after the symposium held in Mossel Bay on 24 and 25 March.

Day 1 focused on people management

Inspirational speaker and author Jannie Putter reflected on how one can work against victimhood in the challenges we are confronted with in daily life. Tackle challenges differently, shift your focus from reality to faith, change your language and change your label by turning the negative into the positive. "Be aware of the realities in your life and what is trapped behind those realities," he said.

Lizelle Jacobs, a life and business coach, unpacked the question of whether integrity and loyalty in the workplace are fact or fiction. She said that managers should not confuse employees' blind obedience, often driven by fear, with loyalty, but should instead intentionally create a sense of purpose in the workplace, especially for younger people. "Your people do not believe in what you do, but why you do it," she said, referring to tips for achieving higher levels of employee engagement.

VKB's executive head of Human Capital, Francois Sieberhagen, challenged symposium attendees to rethink leadership. A new era of leadership in the grain industry does not exclusively imply a younger generation taking over. Remain relevant in the industry by embracing new technology such as artificial intelligence, but above all by demonstrating human-centred leadership. "Move from being a manager to an inspiring leader and then a coach who develops his team to reach their full potential," was his advice.

A panel discussion on the theme of loyalty was led by Lizelle Jacobs. According to Francois Sieberhagen (VKB), leaders make time for one-on-one conversations with team members when the company culture is adapted to prioritise this. "Also work on deep relationships with the producers you serve," he said. Jerry Maritz (chairperson of Agbiz Grain) said silo teams are entrusted with millions of rands. Rules and regulations are unavoidable, and the challenge remains to find a balance with empowering team members. Dr Sierk Ybema said new technology need not be a threat – the more you know about your grain, the better. "Even artificial intelligence needs people to operate it. Sensory observations at silo level will always remain important."

Day 2 focused on technology and the value chain

Pieter Geldenhuys, technology strategist at the Institute for Technology Strategy and Innovation, opened Day 2 with an insightful presentation on digital transformation as part of the new harvest in the grain value chain. He addressed the fear around the use of artificial intelligence (AI): "The capability you gain through using AI to increase productivity and create additional available time is enormous." His presentation concluded with a demonstration of an AI-created model for optimising the grain value chain.

Agricultural markets worldwide have become increasingly exposed to climate-driven volatility. Dr Mariëtte Geyser (Economic and Management Sciences at North West University) looked at the impact of climate on grain price levels. Smart futures do not arise from avoiding risk, but from better pricing of risk, better interpretation of timing and faster sharing of knowledge.

Dr Tobias Doyer, CEO of Grain SA, turned the spotlight onto the next decade of grain in South Africa in his presentation, with a focus on policy, people and productivity. With an expected population of 75 million by 2040, South Africa will require about 24 million tonnes of maize per year. By investing strategically in research and enabling science-based policy decision-making, South Africa can ensure a resilient, innovative and globally competitive grain industry. South African producers must be efficient enough to compete with their products on international markets, or to channel their products through animal protein. He referred to how efficiency can be improved, what is needed to achieve this, and the approvals and technologies in which investment must be made.

A panel discussion on how competitiveness in the grain value chain can be maintained – and the influence of the regulatory environment on this – was led by Dr Tobias Doyer. Anina Hunter (chairperson of AFMA) provided information on the animal feed industry – one of the largest consumers of grain – and its efficient handling of biosecurity, as well as the positive contribution of self-regulation. Regarding logistics, Tom Terblanche (Grain Carriers) mentioned that cost management and cost-effectiveness present major challenges. "The inefficiency of the country's rail transport, as well as the deterioration of road and port infrastructure, is limiting international trade," he added. According to Johan van Rensburg (VKB), grain can once again be made attractive if role players in the industry choose to apply their knowledge and continue learning.

Political analyst Dr Theuns Eloff said in his overview of the politics and the road ahead that the Government of National Unity (GNU) is still standing at present, but that this year's local elections will put it to the test. He believes smaller political parties will continue to gain support, which could have an impact on the outcome of the national election in 2029. There are, however, green shoots visible in both politics and the economy. He believes that although matters in the country may appear problematic in the short term – particularly due to the war in the Middle East – the outlook is moderately positive in the medium term and very positive in the long term.

At the helm of GOSA

The terms of four board members came to an end this year. Marco Pretorius (AFGRI) was not eligible for re-election. In addition to nominations received for Johan van Rensburg (VKB), Dries Dannhauser (Tiger Brands) and Rinus Bezuidenhout (Bester), a co-opted member of the Board, Thys Visagie (NWK), was appointed as a board member in the vacant position. During a board meeting after the annual general meeting, Johan van Rensburg was re-elected as president and Dries Dannhauser as treasurer.

GOSA would like to thank **AGI** as the main sponsor of the symposium, as well as each of the other sponsors who made the event possible. Next year's symposium will take place on 17 and 18 March at the Diaz Strand Hotel in Mossel Bay.

GOSA's Board for 2026/2027 is (front): Althea Emslie (co-opted; Perdigon), Ferdinand Meyer (vice-president; Ronin), Johan van Rensburg (president; VKB) and Dries Dannhauser (treasurer; Tiger Brands). Back: Japie Snyman (co-opted; Olam Agri), Thys Visagie (NWK), Stefan van Staden (AFGRI Milling), Willem Strauss (RMB), Rinus Bezuidenhout (Bester), Dries van Jaarsveld (Bester), Johan Smit (Marketing), Dawid Beets (Tiger Brands) and Trudie Smit (Secretariat).

Johan van Rensburg of VKB was re-elected as president of GOSA on 24 March this year.

ENDS

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE GRAIN HANDLING ORGANISATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (GOSA) BY ***INFOWORKS*** *ON* ***09 APRIL 2026***

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