



People buy from people at Van Breda Agri

Startling similarities exist when one compares how Kobie van Breda started his business in a farm workshop near Banhoek in 1984 to that of Irvine Bell doing the same, some thirty years earlier in 1954 near Empangeni.

Today, the late Irvine Bell's company Bell Equipment, although now a large multinational company, has not lost its personal touch much the same as Kobie van Breda's Van Breda Agri has kept in close touch with its customer base in the Cape Winelands and Southern Cape.

And the two companies share a common goal of selling and servicing agricultural equipment, with Van Breda Agri having been appointed an independent dealer to sell Bell and JCB agricultural equipment.

Kobie van Breda had qualified as a diesel mechanic before setting up his own workshop on the family's farm near Banhoek, which lies in a postcard picture-like valley

between Stellenbosch and the village of Pniel. Repairing agricultural equipment fitted Kobie's DNA but he wanted more out of life and soon picked up that the many wine and fruit farmers in the area were fervently hoping someone would start importing narrow-built tractors that could fit comfortably between the vines and fruit trees as normal agricultural tractors were too wide.

"Kobie hit on the idea to import 50 Lamborghini tractors from Italy that were specifically designed to be narrow and to draw equally narrow trailers on which crates were loaded that would contain the harvested fruit," says Joris Jacobs, Financial Manager and a Director of Van Breda Agri. "Since moving the business from the farm

to our current base in Stellenbosch in 1992 we've acted as dealers for a number of agricultural tractor and implement ranges."

Van Breda Agri's head office in Stellenbosch is ideally situated on the left-hand side of a busy thoroughfare that enters the historic town from the Klappmuts side, the same road that allows access to many famous wine estates. The building houses administrative and financial offices, a showroom, a large parts department and a workshop. Three sales representatives operate out of here and nine mechanics maintain and repair machines on site and infield, when necessary, in a radius of around 150km.

In addition, Van Breda Agri has a fully-fledged branch in Caledon, in the Southern Cape, where yet another three sales representatives operate from, backed up by four mechanics, administrative staff and a parts department.

"A large percentage of our customer base cultivates grapes for wine, deciduous fruit, citrus, blueberries and pecan nuts and to combat the many insects that plague this industry, these growers need to diligently spray insecticides on their vines, trees and bushes," Joris says. "To this end, in 2012 Kobie started experimenting with building our own branded sprayer and here again, we're involuntarily reminded of the same innovative thinking that Bell Equipment and its founders applied so many years ago."

"The first Van Breda sprayers were towed behind a tractor but with unrelenting research and development, this has now evolved to include a self-driven model that is raised to enable it to straddle vines and other trees up 1,8m in height."

Van Breda Agri's sprayer division is housed in another part of Stellenbosch where it is headed up

by Michael van Wyk who is assisted by Raymond McKenzie and Rens Joubert, a mechatronics engineer. While the designs remain in-house, the best components are sourced worldwide, and the sprayers are sold through a network of dealers across South Africa.

The company's innovative thinking, however, does not end there as Van Breda Agri has entered discussions with training institutions to explore technical and mechanical training for agri-workers, small-scale and emerging farmers in hydroponics and aquaponics and to also understand the rudiments of mechanisation in agriculture.

"We're excited at the thought of giving something back to the community with skills transfer and training," says Jan Coetzee, Van Breda Agri's Sales Manager. "We'd like to teach people who already work in agriculture, or who are engaged in small-scale subsistence farming, to do it better and plan to add courses in repairing mechanical things like tractors, water pumps and other basic agricultural systems."

"We want to be more than just a tractor or an implement dealer as this company has a face," Jan

adds. "We don't have a 'call-centre' mentality here because people know Kobie, Joris and everyone who works within the company – people can buy from people."

Joris and Jan are equally upbeat about the prospect of now offering their established customer base the full range of Bell and JCB range of agricultural equipment as they have already proved by supplying the world-renowned Simonsig Wine Estate with a JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader.

Equally excited is Charles Inggs, Bell Forestry and Agriculture Business Development Manager who says the following: "Van Breda Agri have put their promises of sales into action early on by already selling our branded equipment into their region and we're confident that this is the start of a valuable business relationship for all concerned."

"As both Bell and JCB are established brands focused on our customers and growth, we're happy to have chosen Van Breda Agri to further grow our brands as well as their own and believe that the synergy that our similar histories create will be a lasting one."



From left: Jan Coetzee (Van Breda Agri, Sales Manager), Kobie van Breda (Founder and Managing Director, Van Breda Agri) and Joris Jacobs (Financial Manager, Van Breda Agri).

