

SABI magazine

Finance and Sustainability

Win-win Fair Trade System

Stellar Organic Winery

INTRO

Fairtrade is an international system of standards for producers, in which the terms of trade look to ensure farmers and workers in some of the poorest countries in the world are protected – and can build a sustainable future. Consumers and ethical purchasers look for the Fairtrade logo – they pay more for the goods, but get the assurance that the product has been ethically produced and assists producers in developing countries to get better international trade deals for their produce. Stellar Organic Winery, in the district famed for the Namaqualand flowers, is enjoying Fairtrade success.

Farm manager of Stellar Winery Maria Malan boasts an exceptional career in her field of viticulture and also was a gender trailblazer in terms of water users' associations. Malan started off working in the home of the Roussouw family in 1976, then moved to being a labourer, working on the vegetable fields. By 1982 the family, seeing Malan's management skills, sent her on a supervisor's course. Today Malan, who completed an 18-month course on table grapes at Elsenburg Agricultural College (and was only the second woman to pass it!), manages a team of 50 permanent workers and 120 seasonal workers. All facets of the farm, from human resources to administration export arrangements are within Malan's ambit.

A pioneer in so many respects, Malan is also chairman of the Stellar Fairtrade committee, and interestingly was the first and only woman representative a few years back on the Lower Olifants River Water Users' Association. At Stellar Winery, Malan says, drip irrigation is used. The water source in this semi-arid region is the Clanwilliam dam. Sensors and computerisation is used in irrigation. Drip lines and regulated deficit irrigation is utilised on this farm, whose cellar processes upwards of 5 000 tonnes of grapes. "We have an irrigation adviser visiting our farm once a week, to guide us on water use and efficiency," says Malan

She is passionate about the organic status of their wines, and especially proud of Stellar's Fairtrade accomplishments. Malan chairs the Stellar Fairtrade Workers' Trust. "We are very proud of our Fairtrade accomplishments. Fairtrade has changed so many things and enabled us to do so much. Our lives have changed, Fair Trade enabled us to improve our lifestyle and securities, by sharing in the profits of the farm. The Fair Trade system ensures that regulation and rules of production, qualities and values go – it goes beyond profits."

Most of the workers are women and single parents, says Malan. "Their jobs are essential to keep body and soul together. A lot of our Fairtrade projects and revenue goes into improving the lives of our children, they are the future generation, and their growth is vital."

The Stellar Employees' Trust is the forum wherein workers identify their needs and also is responsible for managing the income from Fairtrade sales. Fairtrade-labelled wines have enabled the workforce to derive these benefits: transportation to and from work; receiving of healthcare and the services of a community worker, free housing, electricity and water – and all schooling and child-care facilities are subsidised. Before the Fairtrade accreditation, the workers on the farm didn't have electrified houses or sanitation.

On this farm, numerous Fairtrade projects are being implemented: fencing for workers' houses, a commercial organic vegetable garden, a computer centre at Trawal Primary School, a Viognier vineyard planted next to the school (proceeds to be shared by the school and the Stellar Workers' Trust); the purchase of a 26% shareholding in the cellar and a 40% shareholding in Stellar Agri.

Malan says the work ethic on this unique farm is excellent. "I love the job and I love the people. Here at Stellar, one of our main keys to success is that we love our work – and we are seeing the fruits of it all," Malan comments.

Malan takes her message of Fairtrade success beyond South Africa, often visiting international countries to promote Stellar Organics. "I'm so proud of Stellar and all that we work for and produce – and enjoy telling our international customers our unique story too," says this passionate women of the vine.