



S.E.T. for socio-economic growth

National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)

media release

Science in action: Prof Liza Korsten's impact on plant health and food security

Celebrated for her remarkable contributions to science and society, Prof Liza Korsten is honoured by the [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#) as the world observes the International Day of Plant Health on 12 May. Her award-winning work, which has shaped plant health systems, strengthened food safety, and advanced sustainable agriculture, continues to have far-reaching impact both locally and globally.

Prof Korsten is the recipient of the prestigious 2025 Lifetime Award of the 'Science Oscars' of South Africa (SA), the highly acclaimed [NSTF-South32 Awards](#). Her work spans more than four decades of dedication to plant pathology research, food safety, and scientific leadership. Through the Awards, the NSTF recognises and promotes the excellence achieved by individuals, teams and organisations in SA whose work drives innovation and improves lives.

Says Prof Korsten:
"Safe food is a basic human right, and food security is a moral obligation."



Left to right: The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Prof Blade Nzimande, Prof Liza Korsten and Head of Corporate Affairs at South32 Ms Noleen Dube

About Prof Korsten: She is a globally respected plant pathologist and Professor of Plant Health and Food Safety at the University of Pretoria (UP). She also serves as Co-Director of the DSTI-NRF Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Food Security, where she leads research that bridges science, policy, and practical agricultural solutions. (DSTI = Department of Science, Technology and Innovation and NRF = National Research Foundation.)

"The NSTF-South32 Lifetime Award isn't just for me. It honours every student, farmer, and colleague who's walked this road with me."

Her pioneering work focuses on understanding plant diseases, improving post-harvest quality, and ensuring that fresh produce remains safe from farm to table. By developing innovative technologies and systems to detect and prevent contamination, she has significantly reduced crop losses and strengthened food safety standards in SA and beyond.

Her work has revolutionised how plant health is managed, introducing environmentally friendly disease control methods and improving agricultural practices that benefit both farmers and consumers.

"Agriculture is applied by nature," she says. "Science only matters if it reaches the farmer, the policymaker and the consumer."

Beyond research, she has played a key role in shaping national and international food safety policies, contributing expertise to global bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the African Union (AU).

International Day of Plant Health: The International Day of Plant Health, led by FAO, highlights the critical role that healthy plants play in ending hunger, reducing poverty, protecting biodiversity, and supporting economic growth. Plants provide 80% of the food we eat and are fundamental to sustaining life on Earth.

However, plant health is increasingly under threat from climate change, pests, and human activities. These challenges place growing pressure on global food systems and underscore the need for continued investment in research, innovation, and sustainable agricultural practices.

Prof Korsten's work aligns closely with the goals of this international observance, demonstrating how science can provide practical solutions to complex challenges. Her contributions not only advance knowledge but also translate into real-world impact that benefits farmers, consumers, and communities.

As the global community reflects on the importance of plant health, the NSTF calls on all sectors to prioritise the protection of plant resources through increased support for scientific research, stronger biosecurity measures, and the adoption of sustainable practices.

The NSTF further encourages young people to pursue careers in plant science and related fields, highlighting the urgent need for future leaders who can build on the legacy of scientists such as Prof Korsten.

By investing in plant health today, SA and the world can secure a more sustainable, food-secure future for generations to come.

About the NSTF and the NSTF-South32 Awards: NSTF is an independent non-profit stakeholder body and network – a civil-society forum of over [150 member organisations across six membership sectors](#), involved in science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation in SA.

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- YouTube: [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#)
- TikTok: [nstf_sa](#) (listen to [science career talks](#) on this platform)

References

- <https://nstf.org.za/2025/08/21/prof-liza-korsten/>
- <https://www.up.ac.za/plant-and-soil-sciences/prof-lise-korsten>
- <https://foodsecurity.ac.za/news/coe-fs-co-director-professor-lise-korsten-honoured-with-2025-nstf-south32-lifetime-achievement-award/>
- <https://aasciences.africa/news/aas-president-lise-korsten-celebrated-with-lifetime-award-at-science-oscars>
- <https://www.up.ac.za/research-matters/researcher/lise-korsten>
- <https://www.fao.org/plant-health-day/en>

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology engineering and mathematics) - the NSTF proSET membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF proSET)

For more information
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