

In Memoriam*

Joe Darvas
(1945 – 2011)



Joe Darvas grew up and studied plant pathology in his native Hungary before he and his wife, Magdalen, defected at the age of 26 to escape communist rule. A series of events saw them both finding employment as plant pathologists in 1971 in South Africa. Defecting from a communist country in the early 1970s required a special kind of person; one with a vision for the future, and the determination to make this vision a reality, despite great risk and the prospect of never being able to see family and friends again. Joe's determination and vision were evident in his work. His tenacity and love of plant pathology saw him earning a doctorate in Plant Pathology which included his work on the control of avocado black spot (*Pseudocercospora purpurea*). His prediction model for black spot infection is still the basis of controlling this disease in South Africa today.

While working for May & Baker, Joe began his work on the control of avocado root rot (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*), which he continued while employed at Westfalia Estate at a time when root rot was crippling commercial avocado production in South Africa. At Westfalia, he pioneered phosphorous acid tree injections, which saved the industry. His research was not limited to chemical intervention; it included

involvement in the selection of the root rot tolerant rootstocks 'Jovo', 'Latas' and 'Dusa'.

Joe Darvas was talented, passionate about his work, and determined to follow his vision. He was prepared to enter the unknown. The avocado industry is the better for it.

** Contributed by Derek Donkin, CEO of Sub Trop and the South African Avocado Growers Association, Tzaneen, South Africa*

Editor's Note: Another wonderful reflection on Joe Darvas's contributions to his industry was penned for the 2007 Yearbook 90 pages 103-105, by his friends and colleagues, Jan Toerien and J.M. Kotze.