



## The story of Bigbucks

**FREDERIK VOIGT** *BUM: Production, SAPO Trust, Fleurbaix, Stellenbosch, South Africa.*

It all started on the afternoon of 18 January 2011, one of those few very hot days in Elgin,” says Buks Nel, (pic top right), founder of the newly released Bigbucks apple variety.

Every year from about the middle of January he makes it his business to walk Royal Gala orchards in the hope of stumbling upon a tree or branch mutation that would be su-

perior to the clones available. Buks mentions that he has a soft spot for this New Zealand-bred variety which was tested in the Cape during the 1970s. His love and devotion to the development of Royal Gala led to him receiving the O.H.S. Reinecke medal from the Cape Pomology Society in 2000.

The original standard Gala was supersed-

ed by the Royal Gala found by Bill Ten Hove in New Zealand in the 1960s. As mentioned, in the seventies it made its way to South Africa. Buks laments on how hard it was to convince the then Deciduous Fruit Board that Royal Gala had real potential in the South African apple industry. At the time, they thought it might be confused with an





over-ripe Starking! Luckily due to people like Buks, who believed in Royal Gala, the first trees were planted in the Two-a-Day Group at Oak Valley Estates.

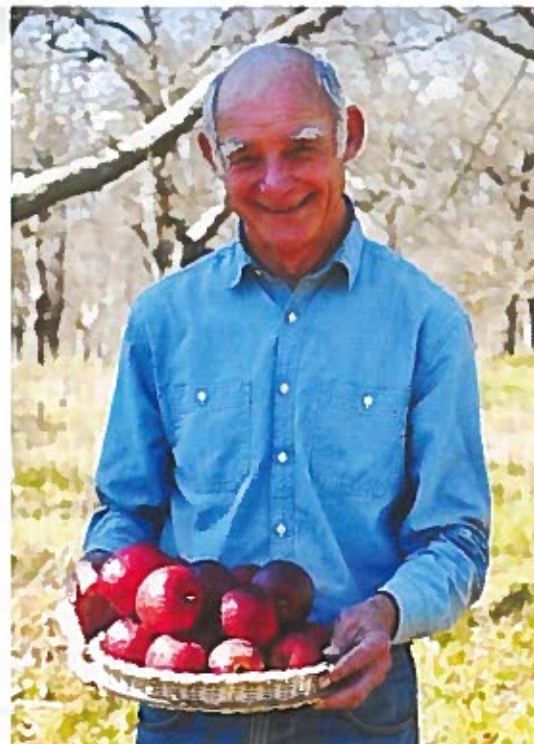
Royal Gala grew to between 10% and 15% of all apple plantings, until in the early 1990s when Robert Zulch found a very superior mutation called Royal Beaut on his farm, Wakkerstroom, in the Witzenberg Valley in Ceres. Soon it became the most planted Gala clone, as evident in the statistics. Corder Gala was another superior mutation planted in limited quantities found on Beaulieu in Elgin by Derek Corder. Royal Gala and its clones have an inherent instability. "Reversion" to the original poorer bi-coloured mutations is a negative characteristic that occurs relatively often. They are, on the other hand, also very prone to mutate into better coloured clones. Therefore, reversions (negative) and mutations (positive) are as much part of Royal Gala "as brandy is to Coke!" states Buks. Poorer colour and instability have for years hampered Royal Gala and its clones. This figure could vary from 5% to 50%.

As can be imagined, finding a full red Royal Gala during one of his orchard walks, was a big surprise to Buks, not believing his eyes! A Gala that was already wine red on 18 January 2011, three weeks before normal Gala harvest time, was something special.

What's more, it had no stripes, which is very atypical of Gala mutations. The following winter, Buks grafted a few buds from the mutation and the next spring he followed its progress right from the start of the season. Firstly, the blossom was darker red, the fruit stem was red, the fruitlets were full red within the first month after flowering and the leaf (later in the season) showed a distinct red central vein. It matured at the same time as normal Gala.

The most encouraging thing was that no reversions were observed; the trees and fruit were true to type. In contrast to the usual two or three picks of normal Royal Gala clones, Bigbucks is seen as a "one-pick" variety. This is, of course, a massive advantage. But there is also a danger in that with such an early full red apple, growers could be tempted to harvest too early. This would certainly damage the eating quality of Bigbucks' fruit. The variety should not be harvested on colour but on physiological maturity.

Today, with only one hectare planted during 2014, good interest in the variety followed. SAPO Trust is managing the variety locally. It is open to all growers, with Tru-Cape growers having the first choice of refusal, while quantities are limited. After that, it will be a case of first come, first served. Bigbucks is owned by Pink Vein (Pty) Ltd



with Derek Corder, Anthony Rawbone-Viljoen and Buks Nel being the shareholders. Tree royalties will be due and the fruit sold under a trademark with a levy per carton. Pink Vein has appointed a licensee in Europe, but further testing is still needed in Europe and other territories. "Finally", Buks reports, "Bigbucks is a Gala mutation and no Gala so far had 100% stability. But I believe it to be as stable as any mutation I have seen locally".

SAPO Trust is proud to be involved in the development and upgrading processes of Royal Gala mutations over the years with the owners, i.e. Robert Zulch with Royal Beaut, Derek Corder with Corder Gala and recently Pink Vein partners with Bigbucks, who are also Tru-Cape members.

