

The Farmers' Chronicles

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Sheep Shearing Greatness: The Stories of South Africa's World Champions

South Africa is at it again, this time in New Zealand. Here, the margin for error is measured in seconds. Every action taken is calculated. Two South Africans have now proven once again why the rest of the world follows their standards. On 4 March 2026, in the town of Masterton, New Zealand, Bonile Rabela and Teboho Nyatsa competed side-by-side with the top sheep shearers from around the globe.

For the second time in two days, and for the fourth time in three months, Rabela and Nyatsa found themselves standing atop a podium at the Golden Shears World Shearing and Wool Handling Championships. Once again, the pair demonstrated the level of dominance South

Africa has shown over the past decade. Rabela won his second consecutive title as World Champion Hand Shearer. Nyatsa, competing for the first time on the international stage, finished with a silver medal. Together, Rabela and Nyatsa were able to claim a silver medal in the Team Hand Shear category of the championships, which solidified South Africa's position as the dominant force in global sheep shearing.

Nyatsa also won a gold medal in the All-Nations category and Rabela took home a bronze medal. As with previous championships, South Africa's victory represented six consecutive titles in hand shearing. More than a testament





to exceptional ability, South Africa's consistent successes reflect a cultural commitment to discipline, preparation, and achievement. Bonile Rabela's journey to becoming one of the world's greatest hand shearers has been shaped by resolve. Born in Nomlengana Village near Sterkspruit and eventually moving to Kromspruit, Rabela's entry into sheep shearing was neither based on formal education nor on planning. Instead, his journey was largely driven by necessity and determination. When Rabela sought employment, he had no idea that the job that he landed at BKB as a hand (blade) shearer would introduce him to sheep shearing and help establish his long-term career goals.

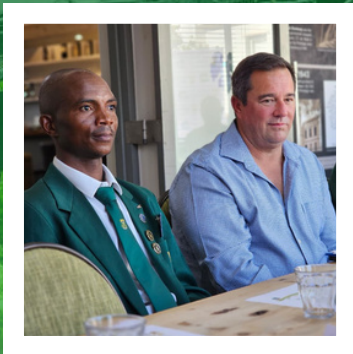
In 2006, he moved to work at BKB as a hand (blade) shearer in Northern Cape and honed his technical skills. Yet he quickly realised that restricted access to competitions would limit his potential as a competitor. Therefore, in 2010, he decided to take a significant risk by leaving BKB to pursue full-time private shearing services. This decision opened doors to opportunities that he could never have imagined.

In 2018, Rabela's perseverance finally paid dividends when he finished second at a national competition held in Bloemfontein. That day signalled that he was ready for international competition. He accomplished this goal in 2019 by representing South Africa at the World Championships in France, where he earned a bronze medal. For several years thereafter, Rabela continually improved his skills through

consistent participation in national competitions. During those years, he gained enough confidence to allow himself to be considered for selection to represent South Africa at the 2023 Golden Shears World Championships in Scotland. Unfortunately, owing to unforeseen circumstances, one member of Team South Africa was unable to attend. Rabela stepped up to fill that gap despite being untested on foreign sheep breeds and facing tremendous pressure to continue South Africa's winning ways. He responded well, winning the world title and leading Team South Africa to win the overall championship.

This spring, Rabela managed something extremely rare, and defended his world title. His career is a testament to how hard work, discipline and faith can turn difficult beginnings into successful futures.

At age 26, Teboho Nyatsa represents a new generation of outstanding young South African sheep shearers. Growing up in a small village located south of Burgersdorp in Eastern Cape, Nyatsa lived among sheep herders his entire childhood. Over time, this exposure transformed into an enthusiasm that defined his adult career. Upon completing high school, Nyatsa attended formal training in sheep shearing and received certification under the instruction of Mr S Nkomonye. Now having built a solid base for his future career, he entered his first competition during 2022 representing his Nyatsa Sheep Shearing Team. In each of his subsequent years



of competing, Nyatsa steadily climbed the ranks finishing third in his first year of competition, first in 2023 and then placing third again in 2025.

That third-place finish at the 2025 championships provided Nyatsa with an opportunity to make history by competing internationally for the first time. At the 2026 World Championships in New Zealand, he took advantage of that chance. Representing South Africa, competing against many skilled competitors from across the world with far more international experience than him, he still performed excellently, earning a silver and a gold medal in the All-Nations category.

Currently employed as both a blade shearer and machine shearer with Nyatsa Rural Shearing Services in Free State, after five years of competitive experience, he has established a career trajectory that indicates his success will only grow from here. His journey is an example of how preparation, persistence and courage may lead individuals to larger roles. Both Rabela and Nyatsa's success has soared at a time when the wool industry in South Africa is rapidly growing. Between August 2025 and March 2026, South African wool prices rose more than 40%. At the beginning of the season (August 2025), the price per kg was R175,04. After the 26th wool auction, the price was up to R245,43 per kg. More than just a price increase, for sheep farmers this represents a recovery and a chance to reinvest in their farms.

Price increases are mainly being influenced by several factors globally, including supply shortages from the one of the top three producing countries, namely Australia. Additionally, there is an increasing demand for natural fibres that are produced under sustainable or ethical practices. Although South Africa only contributes less than 2,4% to the total global wool supply, it holds one of the strongest positions in the world in terms of being the world's leading producer of certified sustainable wool and the second largest producer of wool used in the apparel industry.

More than 45% of South African wool is now classified as sustainable, meeting the needs of consumers who are increasingly looking for products made from sustainable materials and thereby supporting a company's reputation in the premium wool market. In addition to the demand for sustainable wool, there is also an increasing demand for finer wool types, specifically those that range between 18,5 to 21 microns.

While the outlook for the South African wool industry appears to be good, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. Due to the drought conditions experienced in various areas over the last few seasons, along with some producers deciding to retain their stock in hopes of achieving higher prices, overall wool production decreased slightly in 2024/25. Exports also decreased by greater than 20%, primarily owing to a decline in demand from China.



While these changes demonstrate the need for building resilience into all aspects of the industry (including diversifying export markets, improving the efficiency of production systems, etc.), they will ultimately benefit the future of the wool industry. To honour both Bonile Rabela and Teboho Nyatsa, the national Department of Agriculture hosted a function at Beyerskloof Farm outside Stellenbosch on 23 April 2026, at which Minister John Steenhuisen recognised them for their recent success abroad, their hard work, discipline, perseverance and contribution to the industry.

Bonile Rabela and Teboho Nyatsa's accomplishments extend far past winning medals and titles. Their story tells of overcoming adversity through their own determination and desire for excellence and, the emergence of a new generation ready to push South Africa's agricultural industry even further. Together, their stories represent the true potential of South Africa's agricultural sector and its greatest asset, the individuals working within it.

