



# OAK VALLEY: CONSERVATION AND CUT FLOWERS

**Oak Valley Wines in the Overberg district has become the ninth Cape wine farm to achieve champion status, conferred by the Biodiversity Wine Initiative (BWI), a pioneering partnership between the South African wine industry and the conservation sector.**

It has been acknowledged for its long-standing track record in the conservation of its natural resources, in particular for its preservation and ongoing restoration of large tracts of mountain fynbos found in the Cape floral kingdom. Oak Valley is a founder member of the Groenlandberg Conservancy and the Green Mountain Eco Route, established in 2005 to promote and preserve the fynbos heritage of the region.

Oak Valley's role in the conservation of threatened flora and fauna encapsulates BWI's central philosophy of conservation and continual improvement of all aspects of environmental management on the farm. The BWI's main objective is to minimise the further loss of natural habitat of the Cape fynbos to vineyards, while simultaneously making a formal contribution to sustainable wine production. BWI champions are exemplary producers who have earned recognition for their excellent track record of environmental responsibility. They are regarded as leaders in the industry with respect to the conservation of biodiversity. These flagship farms have put in place a comprehensive conservation management plan with a team of dedicated staff implementing these initiatives which include alien clearing, fire management and voluntary conservation agreements, pledging their natural areas to a long-term commitment to conservation.

Oak Valley entered the programme as a member in 2005 and since then has worked consistently at environmental improvement, including alien-clearing activities and a comprehensive waste management plan for the farm. It has also played a significant role in conservation, helping to preserve 282 hectares of pristine mountain fynbos, including the largest known remaining colony of *Protea stokoei* in the Western Cape. The farm also has 30 hectares of historic oak trees which are protected in perpetuity.

A comprehensive conservation management plan for Oak Valley was drawn up in 2000 by environmental consultant Janette du Toit. She continuously updates it and monitors its implementation, together with the management staff at Oak Valley. As detailed in this plan, the pristine fynbos area will be enlarged as mountain areas of less accessible, alien-infested land are rehabilitated.

A start has been made in compiling a species list of the mountain fynbos, which already contains five Red Data plant species, including the rare *Linconia cuspidata* of the family *Bruniaceae*.

## Cut Flower Operation

Oak Valley Flowers produces approximately 14 hectares of cut flowers for the local market, mainly the Western, Southern and Eastern Cape. It is also a major supplier to Woolworths in the Western and Eastern Cape and there is a large bouquet-making division. This uses Oak Valley's own products as well as others sourced from around the country.

There are currently 4.5ha of greenhouses in production, with an additional 8 000m<sup>2</sup> structure to be completed in August this year solely for the expansion of the *Alstroemeria* programme. The remaining area is made up of 4.5ha shadehouses (soon to be expanded to 6.5ha) and 3.5ha outdoors.

## Chrysanthemums

All Chrysanthemums are cultivated in fully automated natural ventilation structures. Oak Valley produces on average 40 to 50 different varieties, each with its own growing habits/requirements. Chrysanthemums require day length manipulation to ensure sufficient stem length (vegetative growth) before flower induction (generative growth) occurs. Under long day (LD) circumstances, the crop stays vegetative and to achieve this, day length is kept at 15-16 hours, except during the period from November to February when the natural daylight is sufficient. This happens under blackout screen via cyclic lighting with ordinary 150W light bulbs that create a light level of 70 - 100 lux.



*Alstroemeria* 'White Diamond'



Chrysanthemum Pink



Chrysanthemum mix