

# MONEY

## DOES GROW ON TREES

In fruit farmer **Handri Conradie**, old-school ethics meet modern smarts

**F**or the past eight years, Handri Conradie, founder and MD of At Source Handmade Foods, has strived to produce soft, juicy, delicious dried fruit, using the foundational knowledge gleaned from a childhood spent on the family farm Koelfontein, in the Western Cape's Ceres Valley.

When he and his brother took over the farm in 2002, it was already renowned for its quality fruits, but Conradie believed they had the potential to integrate further down the food chain and took steps to process, package and distribute them. "I like to think I work smarter," he says, referring to the days when his father ran the farm, "but we've maintained an old-school work ethic."

Today, At Source Handmade Foods is the largest retailing "house brand" dried fruit supplier in the country, numbering Woolworths and Pick n Pay among its clients. In fact, At Source was named the Woolworths Supplier of the Year 2008 in the snacks category. And with a 4,000m<sup>2</sup> processing and packaging facility, some 110 different product lines and up to 250 employees processing some 4 million units of fruit a year, Conradie can literally bask in the fruits of his labour.

"I sometimes cringe when I recall some

of the risks I took (including mortgaging the farm to raise money for the business development)," he says. "The initial investment really was a leap of faith. I knew what I wanted, I believed it could happen and I simply went for it. You have to 'go big or go home.'"

It was also vital to conduct thorough research into all aspects of the business, from growing the fruit to getting it on shelves, he says. "You need to go out there and ask lots of stupid questions. You must also recognise the areas in which you need help."

Conradie stresses the importance of employing the right people who can make independent, informed decisions. "My job is to provide the vision and leadership role and ensure everyone else is on board," he says.

At Source Handmade Foods is now looking at the international market as well as launching its own food label. Over the next three years, growth will be the company's main driver. "We want to build something we can be proud of and leave a legacy that will outlive us all," says Conradie.

