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R307m Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers Programme launched

4TH MAY 2020 BY: TASNEEM BULBULIA - CREAMER MEDIA REPORTER

Industry body, the Citrus Growers Association (CGA), has issued a call for applications for a R307-million Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers Programme that has been launched.

The programme is expected to create an additional 1 726 permanent and seasonal jobs in the citrus industry.

The programme was welcome by the CGA and the Jobs Fund, as South Africa begins the difficult task of rebuilding its economy amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The creation of employment opportunities, especially in rural areas, was highlighted as an essential step on the road to economic recovery.

Last year, the CGA submitted an application to the Jobs Fund for a project that would make funding and technical support available to black citrus growers for orchard establishment, expansion and rehabilitation, as well as on-farm development of various infrastructure including packhouses, bulk water supply and irrigation systems.

The Jobs Fund has committed R118-million to the project, with the Land Bank agreeing to contribute an additional R116-million in loan funding. The CGA has contributed R24-million, while the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Agriseta have pledged R34-million and R12-million, respectively.

The CGA has appointed Lima Rural Development as the programme manager. The Citrus Academy will provide skills development support, which is compulsory for all programme beneficiaries, while the CGA Grower Development Company (CGA-GDC) will be the implementation agent for the programme.

The programme will be implemented over three years across South Africa, with a specific focus on the Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, North West and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.

To qualify for funding, growers have to have a minimum of 60% black ownership, while priority will be given to enterprises with 100% black ownership.

Other criteria that need to be met include: producing or packing citrus that is exported; having appropriate management structures; relationships with external service providers (financial auditors, legal services, logistics, fruit exports etc.); human resource development plans; and security of land tenure and sufficient water supply.

Most importantly, applicants must also demonstrate that they will create permanent and seasonal job opportunities with the development funding.

“The citrus industry has focused on ensuring consumers have access to fresh citrus fruit while safeguarding the health of its workers during the national lockdown. However, we know Covid-19 poses many risks to the agriculture sector, in particular, smaller-scale and developing farmers who already face financial challenges.

We believe the Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers Programme will help mitigate the impact of the pandemic and make a major contribution to one of the CGA’s and government’s main objectives, which is to grow the volume, value and level of participation of black citrus growers in the industry,” says CGA CEO **Justin Chadwick**.

“Despite work done over the past few years transformation in the industry remains constrained, the usual barriers persist. The Jobs Fund’s participation will enable the CGA to increase the pool of black citrus growers who will be given the necessary resources to ensure that they expand their operations and become sustainable.

“The revolving loan component will ensure the programme’s continued ability to reach more growers post the Jobs Fund’s involvement,” says Jobs Fund head **Najwah Allie-Edries**.

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