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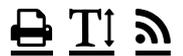


South Africa's Citrus Academy fosters produce stars of the future

by Tommy Leighton

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The students gain practical learning opportunities and exposure within the produce industry



When a group of students from South Africa's Citrus Academy came to the inaugural London Produce Show and Conference in 2014, they added great value to the event with their infectious enthusiasm, as illustrated by this film they produced to mark the occasion. The Academy, which is heavily funded by the country's forward-thinking citrus sector, has now been in place for more than a decade and has already produced many of the stars of the future fruit trade. We caught up with general manager Jacomien De Klerk to find out more

The Citrus Academy has been around for a decade now – how have you evolved?

Jacomien De Klerk (JDK): The Academy was established in 2005, originally as a department of the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) in South Africa. In 2007, it was registered as a separate non-profit company, although our purpose still is to fulfil part of the development and transformation mandate of the CGA. In fact, interestingly our mandate, mission and key objectives have not really changed much since 2005. We were established to enable and facilitate human resource development within the Southern African citrus industry, and that is what we still do to this day.

It is important to note that the Academy is not a learning provider – we don't ourselves deliver any courses – but an enabler. Our original key objectives were to address the challenges of low skills levels, employment equity, scarce and critical skills and transformation, and to that list only one other issue has been added since then, that being the quality of learning delivery.

The manner in which we address these challenges has evolved as we have added more services and programmes to address needs that became apparent as we went about our business, and that fell within our mandate. We have managed to remain responsive and flexible in the way we approach what we do, meaning that we could react to new challenges when necessary.

The Academy is largely funded by South Africa's citrus industry, which is a pretty unusual approach in this industry, not only in African, but also global terms – how do you work with the industry and what does the industry's support of the project say about its members?

JDK: We receive a service fee from the Citrus Growers Association which covers our overhead costs and enables us to keep the Citrus Academy going. For specific projects, we get funding from other sources, mostly within South Africa. For instance, we get bursary

funding from the **Citrus Industry Trust** and the **AgriSETA**. From time to time, we get workshop funding from the **Department of Agriculture**, and we receive small sponsorships for various programmes from within the industry.

The CGA, however, remains our main funder, and our mandate is informed by the organisation. CGA has a responsibility of addressing transformation within the citrus industry, and it established the Academy for this purpose. It also takes a much broader view of transformation than many other industries, which are often focused purely on land or business ownership. For the CGA, transformation starts with black grower development and support, but then goes on to aspects such as employment equity and development in general, on farms, in packhouses, in nurseries, in the research fraternity – in fact, all along the value chain in the industry.

This broad approach is not common, but it has allowed the industry to develop and transform meaningfully and sustainably over the last decade.

The support of the growers and industry bodies has been incredible, not only in funding the Academy, but also in buying into what we are aiming to achieve. I often say that our work would have been a lot more difficult – almost impossible – in a less progressive industry.

How does the Academy fit with the empowerment objectives of South Africa?

JDK: We look to enable citrus growers and other employers in the citrus value chain to address empowerment by supplying them with the people and the tools they need.

In South Africa there are a number of initiatives that have been put in place by the government to address empowerment. The first is employment equity – all companies that employ more than 50 people must submit an annual report showing they have given priority to employing black, Indian and coloured workers. We want to make sure that in the citrus industry this does not end up as pure tokenism by ensuring that there is a pool of educated, qualified, useful individuals for them to employ.

Another major initiative is the **Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment code**, which businesses use to get a particular B-BBEE score. That score gives them access to certain services and to preferential procurement. There are some transactions, such as obtaining water rights, that a company cannot take part in if they do not have a good B-BBEE score. The score is calculated based on the ownership and management control of the company, their employment equity, preferential procurement, skills development, socio-economic development and enterprise development. In order to get a good score, companies have to address and be involved in all of these aspects and we look to make this easier for companies in the citrus industry.

The last government initiative that has direct bearing on us is around land restitution. In this we also have a major role to play in ensuring that new land and business owners develop the skills and knowledge to take on the challenges of ownership without losing the economic opportunity.

How do you find your students each year?

JDK: The Citrus Academy administers a bursary fund through which students are enabled to study at academic institutions all over South Africa. The **Citrus Academy Bursary Fund** was established in 2006, which makes 2015 its 10th year. Over those 10 years, we have allocated more than 500 bursaries to more than 200 individuals. This is something of which we are very proud. The application process for bursaries is open and we run it through our website.

Can you explain a little about the Citrus Business Management Programme and the Citrus Emergent Export Excellence scheme and any others initiatives you run?

JDK: As noted before, the Citrus Academy is not a learning provider – we do not have a campus, we do not hold regular courses. We do, however, from time to time arrange workshops and other learning events in cases where no other learning provider is able to assist in addressing a particular need. We also produce development learning programmes and materials, which are used by other service providers.

The **Citrus Business Management Programme** is an example of a learning programme that we developed. It is based on an accredited qualification in new venture creation, and is aimed at developing business and financial management skills in the context of citrus farming. The Citrus Academy developed the course content and all the course material, and then piloted the programme in the Kat River Valley in the Eastern Cape from September 2014 to May 2015. Twelve learners obtained certificate qualifications in the process, but more importantly, we have seen the positive impact the programme has had on the ability of growers to run their businesses. The programme is now available to other service providers at no cost for further implementation.

An example of a learning event arranged by the Academy was the **Citrus Emergent Export Excellence workshops** that took place at the start of 2015. These workshops were aimed at black growers, and the purpose was to provide them information and insight into the process of exporting citrus. The South African citrus industry is export orientated – about 65% of the citrus produced in South Africa is exported as fresh fruit, but this earns the industry about 92% of its income. For a grower to be profitable, they have to export at least part of their crop. This can be a complex and risky business, and it is important that growers understand the process well. We arranged eleven of these workshops all around the country so that growers would be able to access them reasonably easily.

Is there a typical route for your students when they finish their studies? How many end up working in the citrus industry?

JDK: In terms of the students that have come through the Citrus Academy Bursary Fund over the last ten years, we have had remarkable success.

We work hard at giving students support during their studies, to give them practical learning opportunities and exposure, and to generally develop a positive and lasting relationship with the industry as a whole. This means that most students want to work in the industry and stay in it.

Some graduates end up in the other fruit industries, or working for employers in the value chain, such as chemical companies and farming cooperatives.

We also consider it a win for the industry if Bursary Fund graduates go on to work in government departments or agencies.

Has the Academy proved a success in terms of delivering young people into the workplace and fulfilling the original goals of the CGA?

JDK: Absolutely. We have been able to consistently supply citrus growers with qualified, well-informed employees. In addition, we have also supplied citrus growers with learning material, programmes and tools to develop the skills and knowledge of their existing workforce.

How do you see the evolution of the Citrus Academy from this point on?

JDK: In terms of the future, we need to work on making learning more accessible to workers in rural areas, which places e-learning firmly on the forefront. We also need to focus much more strongly on assisting with the development of government extension services, which are not very effective at the moment.

Apart from that, we will remain responsive and flexible, while keeping up the good work we are already doing.

How dependent is your long-term success on the success of the citrus industry in overcoming some of the issues in its export markets?

JDK: The challenges faced by the citrus industry at the moment affect us all – we are dependent on the levy income generated by the CGA to fund our operations and this is based on export cartons. We are lucky to be operating in a vibrant, growing industry, but this can change if protectionism is allowed to shrink markets. On the other hand, it is people that will find solutions to all these challenges in the end, and we will always be there to empower and support them.

Further reading

[Company profile of the Citrus Academy](#)

[Explanation of the Bursary Fund that underpins the Academy's work](#)

[Video of the Academy's participation at London Produce Show 2014](#)



Citrus Academy students



Andisiwe Kholwane



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Asanda Mdtishwa



Athandile Shoba



Mareli Kellerman



Ncediswa Mbekela



Nhlanhla Nkuna



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Phumeza Sitole



Sibongiseni Mgozeli



Wandile Ngcamphalala



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