

Citrus industry stakeholders visit black farmers

During the 2020 season the citrus industry was hailed for its exceptional production and exports at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic – the most trying of times (economically and socially) worldwide. By **Nomonde Ntloko and Zama Njili**



The citrus industry exported 146 million cartons in the 2020 season, with black growers increasing their production output by 40%. There are currently 150 black citrus growers, with 75% of these growers exporting their produce to global markets. These growers have further increased their output to domestic markets by 55% in the 2020 season. This is a significant increase from the previous season with estimates showing that farmers are expected to have another record season this year.

The phenomenal growth achieved by black citrus growers can be attributed to the support received from the industry as

well as stakeholders such as Fruit SA, the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC), Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), as well as the AgriBEE Charter Council. This has helped to move the citrus industry into a transformative lane, enabling black citrus growers to flourish and grow into commercial citrus entities.

A visit to two citrus farmers in the Peddie and Fort Beaufort area in the Eastern Cape was undertaken by members of the abovementioned entities to receive first-hand knowledge from the farmers on the success they have achieved thus far in their entities, the challenges they experience, how industry has assisted so far in mitigating these challenges and what additional assistance they require.

Ripplemead

The first visit was to Mr Lawrence Mgdle of Ripplemead farm. His introduction into the citrus industry was as an employee of a previous owner of the land he currently owns. He received his 62 ha farm through a Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme in 1993. He began his farming journey having inherited old trees that were yielding low quality fruit and with very limited infrastructure. The other challenge he faced was the process of obtaining his title deeds, which took approximately 23 years. Over the past few years, the farm has received support from the industry and it's developing into a sustainable and profitable long-term enterprise.

With the aim of becoming a commercial farmer, Lawrence has managed to improve his orchard production through replanting old orchards, improved management practices and citrus production and business administration skills development. He exported over 51 000 cartons from 58 ha in the previous season – an increase of approximately 11 000 cartons from his 2019 season. Lawrence exported to major markets such as the EU, China, Canada and Uruguay.

However, this number would have been potentially higher had it not been for the damage to the quality of his fruit in transit to the port. This is one of the many challenges that the farmer voiced during the stakeholders' visit.

In his five-year plan, Lawrence aims to expand his production by planting varieties that are adaptable and highly competitive in the export market.

Oakdene

The second farm visited was Oakdene Citrus, situated approximately 20 km outside Fort Beaufort. Oakdene Citrus currently has 55 ha of citrus in production and is owned by Mr Headman Manyota. Mr Manyota was previously an extension officer at Fortcox.

He left his full-time job when he started leasing the Oakdene Citrus Farm with an option to buy, on condition that he utilises the land productively. He managed to meet the said conditions and bought the farm in 2013, but struggled to obtain his title deeds.

Headman faced further challenges with old unproductive citrus trees and unmarketable pomegranate varieties. He further mentioned that the inability as a black grower to have his own infrastructure made it quite difficult for him to execute his farming activities timeously. This has had a ripple effect on the end product, as quality is paramount in the citrus industry.

With continuous support from industry and industry stakeholders as well as his extensive farming knowledge, Headman's farm has turned into a productive citrus farm that exported over 46 000 cartons from 55 ha in the 2020 season. Headman exported to well sought after markets such as the EU,



NAMC, GDC, AgriBEE Chamber, Fruit SA, DALRRD and Ripplemead farm owner Mr. Manyota

USA, Japan and the Philippines. He has also purchased a further 10 ha of land in order to expand his production before the end of 2021.

Although black growers are faced with various challenges, they too acknowledge the role stakeholders within the industry play in their development and have

urged that they continue. The attending stakeholders acknowledged the challenges met by farmers and committed to, in their respective roles, continue to strive to support the process of transformation within the citrus industry, as well as the agricultural sector as a whole. 🍊



NAMC, GDC, AgriBEE Chamber, Fruit SA, DALRRD and Ripplemead farm owner Mr. Mgdle



Update on citrus academy e-learning programmes

Since the launch of the online platform just over a year ago, the Citrus Academy e-learning programmes have proven to be a valuable added instrument in the academy's toolkit of skills development resources. **Desiree Schonken**



While e-learning can never replace traditional learning interventions such as workshops and classroom training, the online programmes do fulfil an important complementary function.

E-learning programmes are specifically aimed at those who wish to complete

training but are unable to interrupt their work schedule to attend a workshop, or find themselves in remote locations far from the nearest training centre. The Citrus Academy provides the online platform, user support and necessary resources to enable learners to complete courses in their home or office, or in any other location of their choice.

The only requirement is for learners to have access to a smart device, reliable internet and to have an email address. The

e-learning certification programmes such as the Phytosanitary Monitoring and Inspection are particularly suited to completion on smart phones, making it a very practical solution for workers who are field-based and do not necessarily have a high level of computer literacy.

Participation in the online courses has steadily increased over the past 12 months, partly due to lockdown and subsequent cancellation of training workshops. The Citrus Academy is committed to continuous improvement of its online value offering by responding to the industry's needs and constantly developing new programmes. 🍊

For more information about new courses, or to register for an existing course, please visit our website, www.citrusacademy.org.za.