ALG Farms and its empowerment partnership, Cedar Citrus, which is located in the Citrusdal Valley in South Africa's Western Cape region, have started packing their first Fairtrade branded fruit for the United Kingdom market. At the same time the partnership also received certification in terms of the food safety and environmental standards of the world's third biggest retailer, Tesco Plc.

Gerrit van der Merwe, chairman of the ALG Farming Group and a director of Cedar Citrus, says some 15,000 cartons of Fairtrade citrus will be packed for another of the UK's leading retailers, ASDA, and negotiations are underway to extend the Fairtrade branded fruit to Holland.

"Recognition from the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation for our efforts to enhance the working and home lives of our workers, as well as to make them co-owners in citrus growing, is well appreciated," says Mr Van der Merwe.

ALG's farms, as well as the Cedar Citrus farm where ALG has a 50-50 partnership with the group's workers, were certified by the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation towards the end of last season. Only those officially certified by the FLO and approved by the UK's Fairtrade Foundation are allowed to market their fruit under the Fairtrade brand and 2005 is the first season when ALG and Cedar Citrus can do so.

Harriet Lamb, executive director of the Fairtrade Foundation, speaking from London, welcomed the ALG and Cedar Citrus certification. "The Fairtrade Foundation is delighted that the British public can buy Clementines from ALG and Cedar Citrus which, as empowerment farms, are gradually giving black workers more control and ownership of their farms. It is vitally important that increasing numbers of farmers and workers in Africa have the opportunity to participate in the new opportunities which Fairtrade brings, enabling them to be part of building a brighter future for the continent."

Referring to the Tesco Nature's Choice certification, Mr Van der Merwe said this will open many opportunities for ALG and Cedar Citrus. "Tesco Plc has over the past few years grown from the third biggest retailer in the United Kingdom to third in the world. Their network of stores now also extends across Europe and the Far East. Certification by such an important retailer is an honour and will open up many more opportunities for us."

ALG Farming of Citrusdal is one of South Africa's leading citrus growers and has established a fine reputation as quality producers who are able to deliver their fruit to leading retailers in South Africa and around the world.

He says Tesco's Nature's Choice certification now means that the ALG-Cedar Citrus partnership is certified by the most important social, food safety and environment friendly systems in the world. "We now hold certifications for EurepGAP, which is increasingly becoming the international norm for certification of Good Agricultural Practices, Food Safety and Environmental Friendly Practices, as well as Field to Fork (the Marks & Spencer system), Nature's Choice (Tesco Plc) and Fairtrade. Our packing operations meet HACCP standards."

He says the international certification enhances ALG's position amongst retailers in South Africa. "We pride ourselves on being leading edge suppliers to South African retailers who share our philosophy of constant innovation. There is now no doubt that we meet the most demanding international Fairtrade, food safety and environmental standards and can also further develop our business here locally."

"In this regard we are also happy to confirm that ALG Marketing have been licensed to offer South African retailers the new range of late mandarin varieties which is now increasingly becoming available from South Africa. The most prominent of these varieties, ClemenGold (also known under the cultivar name Afourer), is already producing in significant volumes."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35
It has been extremely well received, both locally and internationally, for excellent overall quality, superior taste and very good shelf life.

Obviously delighted with the new development, Mr Dirk Dirks, one of the directors of Cedar Citrus, says the partnership between the workers and ALG Farms is a great success. "We have seen this co-ownership project grow and our ability to also take advantage of the strong growth in the international market, particularly in the United States, have contributed to this."

Mr Dirks says Cedar Citrus have been planted with the best varieties and is a model for the development of new partnerships between growers and workers. "We have the best late summer navels, as well as Mor and Or, which will give us the opportunity to supply the late mandarin market. The association with ALG Farms, where we have been involved with citrus farming for generations, gives us access to the best training and development opportunities, as well as the best quality systems. The latest Nature's Choice certification is an example of the high standards that we achieve at our own farm and in our partnership with ALG," he says.

Mr Van der Merwe says in terms of their Fairtrade Certification the directors of ALG and Cedar Citrus have set up a Joint Body with workers to administer the FairTrade premium which will result from marketing under the Fairtrade brand.

"In its deliberations so far the Joint Body has been thinking about supporting educational projects such as computer training for children from the farms, other forms of training and development, and possibly also extending the Cedar Citrus project to Rooibos tea farming."

Mr Van der Merwe says the group has land available that could be used for the Rooibos project and this would be a financially viable way of increasing the income for the workers.