VHEMBE CITRUS FARMERS MEET WITH CGA

In May an important first meeting took place between the Citrus Growers’ Association and Vhembe citrus farmers near Thohoyandou, Limpopo Province. Members of the Department of Agriculture also attended.

The farmers from the Vhembe area consist mainly of small farmers on ≤10 ha farms who grow citrus and mangoes for the local market. Only Mr. Nemoarani has exported fruit this season.

After welcoming and introduction of all present, Mr. Andile Maxwell Hawe, Transformation Manager of the CGA, delivered a short message about the role of the CGA in the life of a citrus farmer. The SA Fruit Journal was introduced and Mr. Hawe stressed the importance of the journal as communication aid where more can be learnt about the industry, and the means of distributing research news. Furthermore he invited the farmers to the yearly Citrus Symposium and asked Mr. Nemoarani to help with the organising thereof.

The aim of the meeting was to build an important structure for communication between the small farmer and the CGA. The farmers had opportunity to set their needs about transformation and the shortfalls they experience to farm market orientated. Mr. Hawe stressed that it was not a day for complaints, but a day to tell the CGA what is needed to strive forward as efficient and market orientated farmers.

Mr. RW Mofamadi, manager of Mofamadi Fruit and Vegetable Produce, thanked Mr. Hawe for the opportunity to meet with the CGA. He said it was the first time that anybody meets with them to convey information and to see to their needs. The only information they had in the past was personal visits to the farm of Mr. Nemoarani. A big need is short courses on the cultivation of citrus. This will be attended to by the CGA in co-working with the Department of Agriculture.

A quick survey revealed only three of the farmers have business plans. The CGA is willing to help them with a business plan for the whole area. Another problem mentioned was that they have difficulty in obtaining land from the tribal leaders and they can’t get loans from financial institutions due to ‘petty-debt’.

Funding for development and maintenance is a problem. Mr. Hawe’s reply was that it is time for each farmer, big or small, to take responsibility for him or herself and not become dependant on the government or other organisations - that the future lies in one’s own hands. Each farmer has to learn to use funds generated for own development.

The meeting was held on the farm of Mr. Israel Nemoarani, newly appointed director of the CGA and was chaired by Mr. NT Mankhili, chairman of the Vhembe citrus farmers.