Zebediela is a citrus estate of considerable proportions and for many years it has held the title of being the largest citrus plantation in the world. It is large enough to appear on road maps and, on approaching Zebediela, you would be forgiven for thinking you were driving into a medium-sized town and not the hub of a citrus plantation.

The estate has had mixed fortunes over the last two decades. Zebediela was originally established in 1914 and over time was expanded to 1900 ha of citrus. This was under private ownership but during the 1980's the South African government bought Zebediela as part of the establishment of the Homeland Policy. The plantation became part of the homeland of Lebowa and the Homelands Development Corporation managed the estate. When the government changed in 1994, the Agricultural Rural Development Corporation (ARDC) took over the management of Zebediela under the auspices of the Limpopo Department of Agriculture.

The government was not properly geared to apply the necessary commercial approach to agricultural management and, towards the end of the 1990's, Zebediela's production saw a steady decline. By 2001, mismanagement, coupled with a severe drought, saw the Zebediela orchards reduced by 800 ha, from 1900 ha to 1100 ha. The current total under citrus is 850 ha.

The management of Zebediela and other large, state-owned agriculture initiatives had clearly not been successful and the communities who had claims to these properties were dissatisfied with the government's management. A government decision was taken to hand over the management of these projects to investors from the private sector that would bring with them the vital commercial and managerial skills. In the case of Zebediela, the government approached Charles Boyes to

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**Zebediela Estate**

Name of project: Zebediela Estate
Location: Mokopane (Potgietersrus)
Contact Person: Peter Schofield / John Boyes
Office Tel: +27 (0)15 307 6600
Email: peter@sevenseasfruit.com
Project details: 850 ha citrus
Expansion plans: 500 - 1000 ha macadamia nuts
No of beneficiaries: 423
No of permanent workers: 235
Institution involved: Department of Land Affairs
"We want to see Zebediela thrive and, therefore, we have re-invested our annual rental in the business for two years in a row," says Lesetja Tlolane, chairman of the Bjaladi Community Property Association, owners of Zebediela.

received the property in 2003. The community consists of 423 people, but the final total has not yet been settled, as a few more individuals are currently being included as beneficiaries.

As part of the granting of the land claim, the Department of Land Affairs has also approved a grant of R16 million for Zebediela Estate.

"Most of the community are older people and they want to invest in Zebediela's future for the future of their children," says Lesetja.

"We are appealing to the youngsters in the community to become involved in the running of Zebediela, as this is the heritage we will be leaving them. One of the universal problems that we also have to contend with is that the youth is generally not interested in agriculture. Our call is, however, yielding some successes, as some of the community's youth are already working on the plantation."

LOUISE BRODIE