merging farmers, businessmen, politicians, scientists and schoolchildren gathered in a marquee tent north of Pretoria on Friday 24th February to celebrate the launch of the Winterveldt Citrus Project.

Unlike many other projects to transform agriculture in South Africa, this project is driven with enthusiasm by the people from the Winterveldt themselves. The citrus industry undertakes to support this project and to help them to develop the skills needed. One can only have hope that the vision of Dr. Sam Motsuenyane will help create a better future for all. A project for the nation, by the nation.

Dr. Sam Motsuenyane (retired diplomat) made the observation a few years ago that many of the Winterveldt inhabitants were leaving the area and left the land unutilised. At the same time Mr. Ahmed Docrat, a businessman from Laudium was looking for a project to give something back to the people of South Africa. Dr. Motsuenyane had an orange orchard with 100 producing trees on his plot in the Winterveldt and realised the potential of starting a citrus project which would benefit the community. They had a meeting and initiated the project in 2002. When the first trees were planted, women from the area laughed and said Dr. Sam would be dead before he could utilise the fruit. His reply was that he has not seen white people dying from planting fruit trees, and that he would take the chance.

Thirty-three thousand trees have been planted since then with a target of 100 000 by 2008. According to Mr. JM Motlou, chairman of the Winterveldt United Farmers Association (WUFA), job creation and improvement in the quality of life are the main driving factors for the programme. The intention is to buy another three adjoining plots to expand the project, and to build offices and a packhouse.

The executive mayor of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, Father SP Mkhatshwa, promised tarred roads for the area. Funding for the project also came from the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and a R1.3m grant from the Northern West Agricultural Department. So far money has been spent or buying and planting trees, drilling boreholes and the repair of dysfunctional boreholes.

Members of the Gaabo-motho Cultural Group.
Left to right: Mr. JM Makhuba (Winterveldt), Mr. Danie Fourie (Magalies), Mr. JM Matlou (Chairman WUFA), Dr. Hennie le Roux (CRI), Dr. Sam Motsuenyane, Mr. Ngama Mauduku (Du Rot Nursery) and Andries Tsukudu (Winterveldt).

Right: Mr. E Mayisela, MEC Agricultural Conservation and Environment: North West Provincial Government.
Below: Mr. Nizam A. Kalla (Amka Products) and Mr. Ahmed Docrat (Solomon's).

Mr. Docrat took the project to children and businesses from the community in Laudium. They contributed by raising money to buy trees and to finance some of the boreholes. “It is not projects that fail, but people. It is necessary for our children to bridge the gap between racial, religious and cultural and work together. Let this project be the model for others to follow. The project will definitely get support from our side,” says Mr. Docrat. The children involved were present.

One of the needs to keep the project going is an agricultural school. This may soon be a reality. Permission from the Department of Education is awaited to turn a vacant school into a training facility. Dr. Hennie le Roux from Citrus Research International (CRI) said that the Citrus Academy would supply citrus training material once the school is functional. Dr Le Roux gave the background on the South African citrus industry and told the attendees about the knowledge available on citrus production in South Africa. He emphasised the research back-up that is utilised to ensure market access. He also stressed the importance not to import any citrus material into the country illegally as this material could potentially carry diseases. Dr. Le Roux encouraged the youth to become entomologists, pathologists and horticulturists to help a vibrant industry grow.

Other beneficiaries that were present were the Magalies Citrus Company and Pick ‘n Pay. Magalies donated a number of shares to the Winterveldt Project. This will ensure that fruit that is not sold as fresh fruit will be processed at the Magalies processing plant near Brits. Pick ‘n Pay donated 1000 trees and promised to distribute citrus from the Winterveldt through their outlets. Absa Bank committed them to a R2m credit facility to be used by the project to expand. The choirs of the Marekhutsane Secondary School and the Gaabo-motho Cultural Group provided entertainment.

Risk more than others think is safe. Care more than others think is wise. Dream more than others think is practical. Expect more than others think is possible.
CLAUDE T BISSELL