Farmers’ Day
PAVES THE WAY FOR ORGANISED CITRUS GROWERS

The farmers’ day held on 31 May 2006 at Tshivhilwi village at Israel Nemaorani’s farm in Vhembe district was viewed as paving the way for emerging, organised citrus growers in Limpopo.

Speaking at the event attended by more than 200 farmers, Transformation Manager; Andile Hawes from Citrus Growers’ Association, which is a national body assisting the citrus industry with amongst others; access to the global markets and optimising cost effective production of good quality fruit; said the farmers’ day signalled a bright future for organised citrus growers from the previously disadvantaged community.

Hawes said emerging citrus growers had failed to organise themselves into a commodity group or a body that would enable them to discuss issues affecting their industry. He said the farmers’ day managed ‘to create awareness to farmers about the importance of stakeholder participation like agro-processors and nurseries and the type of networking available here today’. Hawes said through the farmers’ day, farmers discovered the role that the government has to play in assisting them in their endeavours. He discouraged farmers from the tendency of quitting a particular type of farming and moving to another every time the price went down. He said such tendencies would result in farmers being not-sustainable in the long term.

Regardless of the achievement, Hawes said there was still the challenge of organising farmers into forming associations and he wished there could be an annual provincial citrus farmers’ day. National Department of Agriculture’s assistant director for Food Safety and Quality Directorate; France Mahlangu also made a presentation; on national standards, norms and regulations regarding food safety and quality pertaining to citrus.

Mahlangu explained that quality standards considered internal quality factors like texture, sugar-acid ratio and external characteristics such as appearance, size, shape and colour. “These standards are benchmarked with international standards through the participation in the international standard setting bodies such as the World Trade Organisation, Technical Barriers To Trade and Codex Alimentarius Commission,” he stated. Mahlangu said the government was there to assist farmers, mostly emerging ones, in ensuring that they conformed to food safety and quality requirements.

The national emerging farmer pesticide specialist from South African Pesticide Programme (SAPIP), Mcodisi Madolo, who also addressed the farmers, said his organisation would assist farmers when they needed training in the safe use of insecticides, pesticides and fungicides. Mr Madolo said SAPIP facilitates training by finding a suitable service provider once farmers have identified a training need.