In a previous edition, we said that if planned and implemented properly, skills development and capacity building can make an important contribution to the competitive advantage of a farming operation. Proper planning requires answers to the following questions:

- “Where are we?”
- “Where would we like to be?”
- “How do we get there?”

A skills level assessment is an important tool in finding the answer to the question of where we are, because it allows one to accurately determine the current skills levels of learners. At the same time, skills gaps that learners may have can be identified.

In this instance, skills level means the general NQF level of the skills that the learner has, while skills gaps mean specific areas in which learners do not have the skills and knowledge to match their general skills level.

Two types of skills are assessed during a skills level assessment, being literacy and numeracy skills, and technical skills. Literacy and numeracy skills are assessed through skills level assessments that are available from companies that specialise in ABET training. Skills level assessments for technical skills have been developed by the Citrus Academy for the Plant Production qualifications on NQF levels 1 to 3. A skills level assessment is based on the exit level outcomes of a qualification.

The skills level assessment is in the form of a comprehensive questionnaire that determines the current skills level of the learner and the skills gaps that might exist. A learner may for instance be found to be competent in all technical aspects at a specific level, while lacking skills in areas such as agri-business or good agricultural practices.

The questionnaire is completed with the assistance and under the guidance of a qualified assessor, and in line with the assessment policy of the Citrus Academy. The assessor takes into account the formal education and experience of the learner when deciding which level of assessment to use.

Assessments can be conducted orally or in written form. Oral assessments are by nature more time-consuming and are conducted only in cases where a person is not able to take part in a written assessment. Assessments can also be conducted in the mother tongue of the learner.

After the assessment has been completed, planning can be done for the further education of individual learners. This process is referred to as learning path development. Procedures for best practices for learning path development are available from the Citrus Academy, and this matter will be addressed in more detail in the next issue.

Shortly, where skills gaps are identified the learner can take part in skills programmes to develop those specific skills which are found to be lacking. Once the gaps have been filled, and the learner can be considered competent at that specific level, two courses of action are available.

Learners may choose to undertake a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment against the qualification for the level at which they are deemed to be competent. The second option is for learners to continue with a learnership or skills programmes at the next level. The skills level assessment and additional skills programmes that were completed will be sufficient evidence of learning assumed to be in place for the higher level. Revision and bridging will also be done at the higher level to reinforce the skills and knowledge of the learner and to ensure that they are at the expected level of competency.

The skills level assessment tools and assessment policy is available on the website of the Citrus Academy. Please note that the skills level assessment must be conducted by qualified assessors. Please contact the Citrus Academy for a list of qualified assessors in your area, or visit the website of the Citrus Academy www.citrusacademy.co.za