The initiative of this citrus farm in conjunction with the Sundays River Citrus Company (SRCC) has set the benchmark for land-reform projects in the Province. Assistant Production Manager on the Luthando citrus farm, Nokwanele Mzamo explained: “We want to prove that not all the emerging and land-reform projects have been disasters – there are positive stories too.”

This farm, near Kirkwood, is 75% owned by 59 members of the Luthando Farm Workers’ Trust (LFWT) of which Nokwanele is also a director. Nokwanele won the 2009 National Female Farmer of the Year (for export markets) while the LFWT won the 2009 Eastern Cape and National Agricultural Writers SA Award for the best emerging farmer enterprise. The facts and figures are impressive:

- with a 3% share in the Sundays River Citrus Company, it produced between 250 000 and 270 000 cartons of export citrus in the past season at a packaging percentage of 82%. This is 4% higher than the average of about 100 farmers supplying fruit to the SRCC.
- R2.8 million which was on loan from the Land Bank has been paid back in five years instead of the proposed 25 years. That is real success!

A Marriage of Success – Luthando and the SRCC: The Luthando Farm Workers’ Trust gained access to the Luthando farm via a land Redistribution for agricultural development deal (LRAD) in 2003. Each beneficiary (at that time 70 farm workers) was awarded R20 000 by the State to buy the 130 ha farm worth over R5 million, the balance being via Land Bank loan. The LFWT agreed to receive a 25% share in the farm each year for a period of five years while under the mentorship of the former owner, Hermanus Potgieter.

By 2007, via the 2003 LRAD agreement between Hermanus Potgieter and the LFWT, the LFWT owned 75% of the shares in the farm and Mr Potgieter 25%. In 2008 the SRCC acquired Hermanus’s 25% with the aim of transferring it to the LFWT within the next five years after intensive training and mentoring of beneficiaries. “People need to understand they can’t just get land and say the land belongs to them, they need to work”, explains Nokwanele.

Operation manager of the primary production department at the SRCC, Philip du Plessis managed a local citrus farm before joining the SRCC. He was appointed to manage Luthando and the entire SRCC emerging and land-reform programme and to develop a farm services department to provide services to all SRCC growers. The SRCC emerging farmers currently provide 13% of the company’s export citrus – about 1 million cartons of a total of 8 million per season. The SRCC is determined to increase this to 30% in the next five years.
Johannes Hobbs has taken up the directorship for the PDI’s in the South of the country, after that chair was vacated by Phindi Kema some time ago. Hannes was born in Kirkwood and grew up on a farm there. He completed his education in 1983 in Uitenhage. After working in the furniture retail trade for many years he returned as co-owner of the Farm Welverdiend. He is the Executive Director of Administration and Finance in Wagenaar & Hobbs Citrus which comprises 19.9 ha at present but they are looking at purchasing another 18.7 ha.

Hannes is a perfect candidate for this position in the Eastern Cape having been involved in local community development and having a passion for the citrus industry and agriculture in general. He has a broad knowledge of South Africa’s social, economic and political issues, and apart from being Treasurer of the ANC Cacadu Regional Executive Committee, is on various Boards in a non-executive role, including the Sundays River Citrus Company and the S A Agri Academy.

Hannes has been working closely with the CGA Transformation Administrator, Lukhanyo Nkombisa to improve the communications with emerging farmers in the region as well as with the various government departments.

This story was investigated by Mike Burgess of the Farmer’s Weekly and appeared in the 22/01/10 issue. Thanks to Mike and FW for allowing the CGA to use the article (which has been shortened slightly). Thanks also to Theuns Botha of Landbou Weekblad for the photographs.