

AFRICA / OTHER

Citrus farm eyes export growth amid plans for revitalisation

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Plans to revitalise Limpopo's biggest citrus farm in Zebediel, just outside Polokwane, is aiming to increase the yields from 30 to more than 66 tons per hectare, according to information released by the Government press office.

Once achieved, this will see export cartons increase from just more than 700 000 to more than 2 million. Revenue will grow by 13% per annum and profit per hectare will grow by 35% per annum between 2021 and 2034.

The main focus of the revitalisation programme is centred around the upgrading of water source and irrigation infrastructure, re-establishment of the orchards, a modern technology packhouse, and upgrading of electricity reticulation infrastructure.

Although the total hectares planted will reduce slightly to give way for macadamia nuts development for diversification purposes, the tonnage produced will be more than double.

Zebediela citrus estate is a community-owned enterprise.

The land on which the farm is situated has been returned to the 21 communities through Government's land restitution programme and is held under and managed by

Bjatladi Communal Property Association (CPA) on behalf of the communities.

The estate was at one stage the largest citrus plantation in the Southern Hemisphere, with more than 3 000 hectares of planted citrus.

Over the years it has been managed by various entities under the ownership of the Bjatladi CPA with various degrees of success and limited reinvestment in orchards and infrastructure.

As a result more than 80% of the orchards on the estate are older than 30 years.

The packhouse dates back 50 years and utilises a rope and roller sorting system with manual classification.

There have been varying levels of success and failures from each of the partnership.

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