Investment in emerging black growers is paying off

By Fred Meintjes | 31 July 2023

Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers Programme in South Africa is showing success after initial problems with its implementation

South Africa's Citrus Growers Association (CGA) has said R78.9m has already been released to black growers under the Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers Programme.

"The CGA is extremely proud to be part of this ground-breaking programme, which has not only provided a major leg-up for black growers, who usually struggle to obtain loan funding and financial assistance but has also focused on transferring skills to these farmers as well as creating new jobs in surrounding communities," the association stated.

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"While the ETBCG Programme was launched in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted its implementation, as well as several new challenges faced by the local citrus industry over the past three years, which has threatened the sustainability and profitability of farming operations," explained the CGA's Justin Chadwick.

"These include a major hike in farming input costs and freight rates as well as load shedding and operational issues at ports."

The CGA launched the R307m Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers Initiative in 2019 in partnership with various entities.

These partners are an initiative called the Jobs Fund, the Land Bank, Department of Agriculture, the Agri Seta, the LIMA Rural Development Foundation and a leading bank, First National Bank.

"We are proud to announce that over the past three years just over R161.3m of this funding has been approved and R78.9m disbursed to support black grower citrus operations, creating 78 permanent and 625 seasonal jobs in total, and enabling 208 hectares of new trees to be planted," the CGA said.

"We are pleased that the programme has disbursed R78.9m to eight successful black farming operations across the country, with these funds being used towards access roads, land [illegible] infrastructure, farm equipment, vehicles, fencing, packhouse equipment, a de-greening room, generators, a solar system, and a substation."

The South African industry has predicted that citrus exports could grow to 260m (15 kg) cartons annually by 2032 if all role-players work together.

"With transformation of the industry a key priority over the next ten years, a target for black citrus growers' contribution towards the overall 260m vision has also been set at 50m cartons annually," Chadwick added.