Support offered to black citrus growers in Eastern Cape

By Carl Collen | 3 May 2024

A new R1.2m agreement will support the commercialisation prospects of black citrus producers and break down export barriers

In South Africa, a R1.2m agreement signed by the Citrus Growers Association-Grower Development Company (CGA-GDC) and the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) is set to bolster the commercialisation prospects of black citrus producers in the Eastern Cape.

The 18-month agreement is designed to support the

Left to right: Akho Skenjana, Lukhanyo Nkombisa and Ayanda Wakaba

commercialisation activities of black citrus producers while breaking down the barriers to entry to the export market.

The agreement will initially support ten of the 37 black citrus producers in the Eastern Cape.

The 37 black farmers are drawn from the citrus growing regions of Patensie (5), Sundays River Valley (13) under the Sarah Baartman District Municipality, and in the Kat River Valley known as the Eastern Cape Midlands (19) in the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality, where black citrus producers are mainly concentrated.

According to 2023 statistics, the Eastern Cape citrus industry is the second largest in South Africa after Limpopo contributing 25 per cent to Eastern Cape GDP with 24,508ha under production.

The main export markets for the South African citrus industry are Europe, Africa, the UK, Russia, North America, Asia, and the Middle East.

Citrus varieties produced includes lemons, with the Eastern Cape being the fifth-largest exporter of lemons in the world, soft citrus (mandarins and clementines), oranges (Valencias and navals) and grapefruit.

“The programme will support black citrus producers with compliance with Global Good Agricultural Practices (GlobalGAP),” said Akho Skenjana, ECDC senior manager for manufacturing and agroprocessing.

”The costly Global Good Agricultural Practices certification is a prerequisite for entering the export market,” he continued. ”An additional requirement is compliance with Sustainable Initiative of South Africa’s (SIZA) ethical trade requirements. Farmers need to be certified on both standards to access export markets open to the citrus industry.

”The agreement will also result in the development of a feasibility study for the establishment of post-harvest facilities such as a packhouse and a juicing plant for participation in the value chain and also appreciate additional revenue streams for black farmers and sector.”

Skenjana said the agreement would be critical in ensuring that black citrus producers fully realised their export potential by ensuring that they were compliant with GlobalGAP and SIZA standards.

”The agreement will ensure that black citrus producers have this certification,” he confirmed. “The GlobalGAP ensures compliance with the safe use of chemicals during production and farming practices in the farms. The SIZA certification is an ethical trade requirement which enforces good relationships with farmworkers, adherence to labour laws of the country as well as promoting good living conditions on farms.”

The agreement goes further to include a feasibility study to investigate the establishment of post-harvest facilities such as a packhouse and a juicing plant.

This feasibility study will confirm the need of these facilities as well as the most strategic location, size or capacity and volumes needed.

[illegible]est from black citrus producers from the Saraah Baartman District Municipality. The juicing facility is envisaged for the Kat River Valley in Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape Midlands.

The absence of a juicing facility is seen as a lost opportunity for additional income streams for the farmers.

Lukhanyo Nkombisa, general manager for the Tshwane-headquartered CGA Grower Development Company, said the agreement was part of its goal of driving the development of the citrus industry while contributing to its transformation agenda.

Nkombisa noted that in terms of the agreement, the capital injection would be used for compliance and feasibility studies which would go a long way towards building up black citrus producers in the province.

The compliance work will include the assessments of the farming operations, support, and the certification of black citrus producers.

"The initial target is ten black producers as a start for compliance and certification support," he explained. "In our database we have 32 black farmers in the Eastern Cape that need this type of support.

"Even though some are already exporting, they still need certification support because it is an annual requirement before the start of the citrus season. These certificates need to accompany their exports."

Nkombisa noted that the agreement with the ECDC was central in developing black citrus farmers so that they were ready for commercialisation.

The intention is to build the agreement into a five-year partnership with strict areas of focus, he added.