

Vhembe citrus study groups

The most recent Vhembe citrus study group was held on 14 June at Mbombi's Farm in the Muswane Village of Malamulele in Limpopo Province. By Pandelani Melton Mulaudzi



The topics presented during the study group sessions at Mbombi's Farm in the Collins Chabane Municipality included citrus fertilisation guidelines, irrigation scheduling, and orchard sanitation practices.

Citrus fertilisation guidelines

Mr G Luunzhi from the Limpopo Provincial Department of Agriculture presented the citrus fertilisation guidelines, focusing on the importance of macro- and micro-nutrients in citrus production.

Irrigation scheduling

Melton Mulaudzi of the CGA Grower Development Company (GDC) covered irrigation scheduling. Knowing how much water to apply on any given day is important. Over- and under-irrigation inflict stress on the tree with many negative effects. For the roots to function efficiently, there must be oxygen present in the soil, as well as sufficient moisture for use by the tree. Over-irrigation results in a shutdown of the root system, which in turn, results in the release of stress hormones that can lead to leaf drop. The tree reacts similarly in a drought situation. Adequate irrigation prevents moisture stress and will allow the tree to produce optimally.

Waterlogging due to over-irrigation can also lead to *Phytophthora* infection, commonly known as *Phytophthora* feeder root rot or collar rot.

There are many ways to schedule the amount of irrigation applied. The most common method employed in SA at present is the measurement of soil moisture, using various instruments such as:

- tensiometers
- electronic moisture-sensitive probes
- neutron probes.

Fruit that drops during November and December should be removed from the orchard floor.



Attendees participating in the discussions

Citrus has a relatively shallow rooting depth with most roots located up to 60 cm deep, depending on the soil type and land preparation. The aim is to maintain soil moisture at field water capacity (FWC) in the root zone during spring and summer.

Orchard sanitation practices

Orchard sanitation was also covered by Melton. Fallen or out-of-season fruit left on citrus trees (even after harvesting) become the breeding sources of both fruit flies and false codling moth (FCM).

Weekly orchard sanitation is essential during harvesting. Fruit that drops during November and December should be removed from the orchard floor and should always be monitored, whether it has fallen by November drop or due to FCM. All fallen and out-of-season fruit should be removed and buried in a 60 cm deep hole and covered with a 30 cm layer, or by using the shredding machine method. This should be standard practice between the orchard roads, focusing on the sun side of the trees.



Bostrin 380 WG



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