

ETBCG skills development beneficiaries

Through the CGA ETBCG programme candidates complete an empowering one-year learnership. By Sam Louw

The Citrus Academy oversees the skills and training component of the dynamic Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers (ETBCG) Programme. Meet some of the beneficiaries of this training whose talents are being further developed, while they build a thriving career in a transformed citrus industry.

Babalwa Thys (38) is a fruit delivery controller from the Sunday's River Valley in the Eastern Cape who credits the Citrus Business Management learnership for presenting her with significant prospects. "Way back, I thought the citrus industry was just for farmers, but now I know about all the opportunities agriculture has. I learned a lot about the South African economy." The learnership piqued her interest in further education. She is also full of praise for the facilitators: "They were incredible. They know what they are doing. They explain things so clearly." Babalwa is proud to be in the citrus industry and says citrus people just see things differently, they have a unique love of the land.

Cheslin Ryno Ryners (29) works in the Sunday's River Valley. He was a quality control supervisor when he started the Citrus Business Management Learnership last

year. It has helped him move on to become a successful fruit receiving officer. "I'll be honest, it was difficult in the beginning, but as soon as I got used to the learning work, it went very well. It has meant a lot to me." Cheslin says apart from more technical knowledge, the learnership improved his leadership skills and inspired him to think more about the future.

The new 2023/24 ETBCG learnerships in plant production have commenced in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Benelea Mentoer (30) is from the Citrusdal area and works as a team leader in the local orchards. "I learned so much, especially about communication – how important it is, in any work." The course content on irrigation also stood out for her – it's complexity as well as its importance. She said finding time to study while working and taking care of her child was a challenge,



Benelea Mentoer



Babalwa Thys



Clemend Bird



Cheslin Ryno Ryners

especially since she also recently lost her own mother. But persevering has paid off, she says. "I believe it will make a difference to my future." Asked if she would consider educating herself further, she answered: "Yes, of course!"

Clemend Bird (34) works at Bergendal in Citrusdal. Last year he benefited from the Plant Production Learnership. He found the unit on basic soil fertility and plant nutrition particularly interesting. "I now even look differently at the trees," he says. He also valued delving into the details of the packing and movement of fruit for export. "When you see the citrus leaving the farm, all packed, you are proud. You think, 'I was part of that process', and that fruit is now being enjoyed in America." The learnership inspired him to pursue further agricultural education and he is currently studying farm management.



Kouga Dam-level milestone

Justin Chadwick
(CEO of CGA)

On 24 May 2022 Petrus du Preez, Phillip Dempsey (CGA Director for Patensie), and I visited Kouga Dam, which was then below the 5% level. Petrus and a group of local growers and concerned citizens held weekly prayer sessions for rainfall. On 14 November 2023 Petrus and I fulfilled our promise to return to celebrate with local grower leaders, if the dam overflowed.

Representatives from Gamtoos Irrigation Board and RBX and Hannes de Waal (Chairman of the CGA) witnessed the water flowing over the dam wall, sending up a cool

Answered prayers necessitated a return visit to the overflowing Kouga Dam. By Justin Chadwick



Patensie Director Phillip Dempsey at Kouga Dam

spray of mist as we sipped bubbly and gave thanks for the beautiful sight of a full dam. The growers utilising the Gamtoos River have persevered with water rationing and have invested heavily in boreholes to keep their valued orchards alive. Through this resilience, they have reached a point where they have secured access to water for the foreseeable future.

Grower unity is a key objective of the CGA, and the gathering at the Kouga Dam wall was confirmation that the Patensie region has faced significant challenges as a unified group. The local growers were reminded

that they are part of the greater Southern African citrus family, one that witnessed the persistent drought in that region with great concern, and joined in the prayers for rain.

Export volumes in the Patensie region have almost doubled since 2015, from 7.2 million cartons to 13.2 million in 2023. The growth is largely due to Mandarin volumes increasing from 1.2 million to 4 million cartons. With so many young orchards in the Southern African citrus region, production of 260 million cartons is forecast for 2032. This underscores secured access to water as a critical requirement.

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