

A LEG-UP FOR EMERGING LIME GROWERS

Local emerging lime growers received a leg-up from South African Breweries.

A scant supply of local limes – needed for production of Corona beer – led SAB to invest in lime farming. This gave local production a leg-up, empowering emerging growers and their communities.

According to SAB, Corona beer is traditionally served with a wedge of lime as part of the drinking ritual. However, the growing popularity of the beer in SA was met with a severe shortage of limes.

To solve the problem and boost the South African agriculture sector, SAB formed a community private partnership (CPP) in 2020 to the tune of R19 million with the Moletele Communal Property Association in Limpopo, and Komati Fruit Group to establish and run a farming operation that would ensure reliable local production of limes.

The Moletele community availed one of their farms, Richmond Kopano Farm – which was on lease – to the Komati Fruit Group. The CPP harnessed the financial support from SAB, farming expertise and skills development from Komati Fruit Group, and land from the Moletele community.

This article was adapted from “A ‘sub-lime’ boost for farmers” (*Farmer’s Weekly*, 16 February 2024).



According to SAB, all parties are equally and actively involved, and this resulted in the production of fruit under the name, Moletele Corona Limes.

Less than 10% of more than 90 000 ha of citrus orchards in SA is allocated for lime cultivation. Consequently, consumers often face the choice of buying costly imported limes or substituting them with lemons, which offer a significantly different flavour profile. The opportunity at hand, SAB said, was to boost local lime production, ensuring availability to consumers at a more affordable price compared to the imported equivalent.

Playing a crucial role in the production of Moletele Corona Limes, SAB has entered into an offtake agreement within the CPP, ensuring the purchase of a guaranteed quantity of limes. The surplus of the harvest is either sold on the local market or exported. Through this partnership set-up, Corona Moletele Limes benefits from a readily-available market with SAB, ensuring consistent revenue with each harvest. The ongoing three-phase planting plan has resulted in a total of 34 092 lime trees on the 60 ha farm.

The farm uses an innovative split-block technique where across six production blocks, the operation mimics different seasons to keep the trees flowering at different times, and for much longer. The various crop husbandry interventions used include overhead netting, manipulation irrigation and soil water regulation, creating a highly controlled environment, according to SAB.

In the inaugural full harvest of 2023, the production yielded over 1.1 million limes. Notably, the Moletele Corona Limes sales revenue is reinvested into the Moletele community, benefitting the 1 615 families that it constitutes.

Moreover, the workforce responsible for tending to the farm is sourced from the community, with 12 individuals employed directly. Through indirect employment, encompassing both full-time and part-time positions, the initiative supports up to 55 households within the community.

Speaking on the partnership, Minister Thoko Didiza of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development said, “The Corona Moletele Limes project exemplifies the power of collaboration between private entities, communities and government, showcasing what can be achieved when we are all united for a common goal.

“This collaboration sets a positive precedent for future community-private partnerships in agriculture, showing a great potential to drive sustainable economic development.

“Stakeholders involved in the Moletele Limes project express optimism about scaling up successful initiatives to benefit communities, which is heartening.

“As government, we are encouraging similar collaborations across the agriculture sector, with equal impact on the farming industry and communities at large.

“It is a sure way to build a more resilient, self-sufficient, and prosperous agricultural landscape for South Africa.”

Zoleka Lisa, vice-president of Corporate Affairs at SAB, said the partnership is a purpose-driven intervention that exemplifies

the beer economy in action and shows the unique power of beer to propel SA forward.

“In our commitment to invest in local industries that are connected to our supply chain, we are anchored in the farming fraternity, especially emerging farmers.

“Moletele Corona Limes was born out of that charge, and the fruit of this partnership has elevated the production of limes in South Africa, ensuring an all-year supply of the crop.

“Equally important is the positive change that this intervention has brought to the community of Moletele, from dividends that go to the beneficiary families to job creation, skills development and skills transfer,” she said.

“Moletele Corona Limes is a successful partnership between communities and the private sector. The production has added an additional 60% of landmass to land previously dedicated to lime production in South Africa.

“These limes tell the story of partnership, growth, empowerment, and our unyielding commitment to this country. And importantly, thanks to Moletele Corona Limes, Corona



lovers have the best quality fruit for the well-loved drinking ritual, all year long. This is a win-win for everyone,” added Lisa.

Albert Thabane, chairperson of Moletele CPA, said: “This partnership with SAB and Komati Fruit Group is bearing fruit, thanks to the commitment of all three parties involved. Our livelihoods have been bettered, profits are coming in and we are doing all this sustainably. We have become the largest lime producer in the country, and this project is indeed our future.

“As the Moletele community, we are proud to be custodians of this land and we believe that strategic partnerships such as this, are critical for the profitable use and longevity of our farming operations. And longevity is an important consideration because we envision a future where this precious heritage, the entire Moletele land, is passed on to future generations.”

This promising partnership echoes the sharp focus of the fresh fruit industry on meaningful public-private partnerships that produce sustainable economic development. ▀



Minister Thoko Didiza (centre) with other stakeholders during the first lime harvest under the partnership

The Moletele Corona Limes sales revenue benefits 1 615 families.

