

Nestled in the fertile landscape of Lephepane Village in the Letsitele Valley, lies Craighead Farm.
By Princess Mogale

Craighead Farm

A community-grown citrus enterprise

Craighead Farm is more than a citrus operation; it's a model of inclusive agricultural development and sustainable farming. Born out of a partnership with the Batlhabine community, the farm represents a fusion of land reform, community empowerment, and commercial success in the heart of Tzaneen.

A community-owned vision

Craighead is a B-BBEE community farm, where the Batlhabine community owns the land and holds a 40% stake in the operating company from which it receives annual commercial rental income. With a Workers Empowerment Trust and 60% black ownership, the enterprise reflects a strong commitment to transformation and local participation. This model ensures that profits and decision-making power are shared, aligning agricultural productivity with socio-economic empowerment.

Young trees, growing potential

Since launching its citrus operations in 2021, Craighead has planted 32 hectares of citrus, comprising 10 hectares of lemons and 22 hectares of Valencia Midnight oranges. Despite the trees still being young – ranging from 18 months to 3.5 years – the first commercial harvest in 2025 yielded a promising five tonnes per hectare.

This early success speaks to the quality of planning and care invested in the orchards. A micro-irrigation system supports water efficiency, while tailored nutrient input programmes, based on annual leaf and soil analysis, help optimise tree health and yields.

Craighead is a B-BBEE enterprise where the Batlhabine community holds a 49% stake in the operating company and owns the land.

Smart pest and disease management

Pest control at Craighead is both scientific and sustainable. Bi-weekly scouting has become the cornerstone of their integrated pest management approach, enabling timely and targeted interventions. In addition, the use of beneficial insects, pheromone bait stations, and mating disruptors help manage pest pressure naturally, minimising chemical use and supporting environmental balance.



Craighead harvest workers,
Nyumani (left) and Ompie



Princess Mogale

Labour-intensive, mechanically smart

Mechanisation on the farm is used strategically. While broader tasks like weed slashing, herbicide application, and tree spraying are mechanised, manual labour remains essential for harvesting and delicate work around young trees. This approach balances efficiency with precision, ensuring young trees are protected while local employment is maximized.

Craighead has created 34 permanent jobs across its 285-hectare estate, employing up to 22 seasonal workers during peak periods. Citrus labour peaks in December (local lemon market), February (lemon exports), and July (Midnight oranges). This, enables extended employment opportunities, thanks to enterprise diversification.

Financing growth with resilience

Running a young citrus operation comes with high capital demands, especially when trees are not yet fully productive. To finance its operations, Craighead has mostly relied on its own capital. They've also received small grants, for inputs only, from the CGA-GDC Enterprise Development Fund, and training from the Citrus Academy. Until citrus revenues scale, the farm's income is primarily derived from its mango crop, highlighting the value of crop diversification as a financial cushion.

Breaking into the global market

Its 2025 harvest marked Craighead's entry into the international export market, with fruit shipped to the EU, UK, China, Malaysia and Russia. Given current volumes, the farm is working through a third-party exporter. But, as production scales, the long-term plan is to export under its own Craighead brand.

To meet global market standards, Craighead has already achieved GlobalG.A.P. certification, with SIZA next on the compliance roadmap. Annual internal audits and inspections by the Departments of Agriculture and Labour ensure that quality, safety, and ethical labour practices are maintained.



Engelina next to some of the
latest fruitset at Craighead

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Commitment to biodiversity and innovation

Craighead is also committed to protecting its natural environment. To support biodiversity, the team actively manages the native forest, which comprises about 30% of the estate. These conservation efforts help reduce land degradation, maintain ecosystem services, and create biodiversity corridors on the farm.

In line with its innovative ethos, Craighead is currently participating in a biofertiliser pilot programme, having completed two applications and begun monitoring results. This initiative could further reduce input costs and environmental impact while improving soil health.

The road ahead

With good soils, ample water, and a favourable climate, Craighead is well-positioned for further expansion. In fact, plans are already underway to add another 30 hectares of citrus to boost both productivity and community impact.

But Craighead is a small community farm that has self-funded most of its development costs. Hence, they eagerly await the indicated and – in some cases – promised support from public and private funding sources. This is critical for Craighead's expansion and irrigation, tree planting and input supply. 🍊



Tshepo holds a Craighead
bag for the local market

