



**CGA
Grower
Development
Company**

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newsletter



ED'S NOTE

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This year marks an incredible milestone for the Grower Development Company as we celebrate ten years of operation, working alongside developing growers to continue the meaningful and sustainable transformation of the South African citrus industry. Over the past decade, the GDC has focused on building commercially viable farming enterprises – hand in hand with established citrus growers – that create opportunity, strengthen rural economies, and contribute to the long-term growth of the citrus industry. In this issue, we will highlight the partnerships that have taken us to 10 years, how we plan to use our tools to take us even further, and we will reflect on some stories from growers who have contributed to the success of the Company.

The past year has once again demonstrated that transformation in agriculture is not only necessary but possible when it is supported by strong partnerships, practical expertise, and a shared commitment to long-term success. Today, black citrus growers collectively farm approximately 7,760 hectares across South Africa, with more than 6,800 hectares already in production and a further 936 hectares still coming into bearing. This makes the work of the GDC even more important given the strides that have been made.

Across the country, we continue to see black farmers expanding production, improving yields, strengthening governance structures, and gaining confidence in accessing markets. These achievements reflect the dedication of growers, workers, mentors, and industry stakeholders who recognise that sustainable transformation is a journey that requires patience, persistence, and collaboration.

Transformation is not without its challenges, and the GDC is working closely with the CGA and Citrus Research International as we navigate complex international environments shaped by regional conflicts, infrastructure constraints, and market pressures. Yet, the experiences of the past ten years demonstrate that when transformation initiatives are supported by stakeholders, institutions and are grounded in commercially sound models, the results are both meaningful and enduring.

As the 2026 citrus season kicks off, we are also reminded that transformation is not a once-off achievement, but an ongoing commitment. The GDC remains focused on supporting growers through technical guidance, business development assistance, and platforms that encourage shared learning across the value chain.

Ten years on, the message remains clear: transformation is complex, but it is achievable. With continued collaboration, investment, and shared purpose, the citrus industry can continue to grow in ways that are inclusive, competitive, and sustainable for generations to come.

MESSAGE FROM THE

CGA CEO



As we enter the 2026 citrus season, there is once again a palpable sense of purpose across orchards, packhouses and ports throughout Southern Africa. From the first light of morning, growers, farm workers, technical teams and logistics partners are hard at work, preparing fruit, readying systems and securing supply chains. A new season always brings renewed focus and energy, and this year is no different.

That said, the start of the 2026 season has not been without its challenges. The conflict in the Middle East continues to cast a long shadow over global markets, affecting demand dynamics, shipping routes and transit times, as well as the cost and availability of critical inputs, such as diesel and fertilisers. These disruptions are felt acutely in an export-oriented industry such as ours, where certainty and predictability are essential to planning. Increased freight costs, longer lead times and shifting market conditions have added complexity at a time when margins are already under pressure.

The CGA remains fully committed to supporting growers through this period. Our teams are actively engaging with government, logistics partners, shipping lines and market authorities to advocate for improved access, reduced bottlenecks and practical solutions wherever possible. We continue to provide timely market intelligence, technical support and policy engagement to ensure that the interests of growers are protected and that the industry is best positioned to respond to a volatile global environment.

In our industry, difficult seasons are not the exception - they are part of the agricultural cycle. Citrus production demands patience, resilience and long-term commitment. Weather events, market disruptions and geopolitical uncertainty are realities we all face. What matters is how we respond to them - and that we respond to them together. It is also important to acknowledge that periods of instability do not affect all growers equally.

Developing and black citrus growers, many of whom operate on smaller scales and with younger businesses, are often more exposed to external shocks. Limited buffers, tighter cash flows and higher relative risk mean that global disruptions can have more immediate consequences. Supporting these growers is a matter of sustainability and stability. The future strength of our industry depends on broad-based participation and success.

The CGA remains firmly committed to ensuring that transformation, inclusion and empowerment remain central to everything we do. They are essential to building a resilient, competitive citrus sector that can withstand shocks and seize opportunities over the long term. In this, the role of the GDC is essential.

Our industry has weathered difficult times before. Each time, we have adapted, learned and emerged stronger. I am confident that we will do so again. The 2026 season will test us, but it will also remind us of the depth of expertise, commitment and resolve that exists within Southern African citrus.

TEN YEARS OF THE GDC WHERE WE CAME FROM AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

Over the last decade, the work of the Grower Development Company has helped to define what transformation in South African agriculture can look like. When it was first established, the GDC had four overarching goals: to enhance growers' technical skills, to facilitate market access, to provide business development and management support, and to contribute to the CGA's broader transformation agenda of empowering black growers.

Ten years on, these four goals continue to underpin every aspect of the GDC's work. What has, however, changed, is the scale, the reach, and the depth of impact. Since its founding, the number of black citrus growers in South Africa has increased by 50%, all supported through a model that integrates technical expertise, enterprise development, funding facilitation, and market access.

Recognition of this progress is increasingly visible. In the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture's recent budget speech, MEC Nonceba Kontsiwe highlighted both the scale of black citrus production in the province and the industry's contribution to job creation. This acknowledgement reflects not only the growth of the sector, but the effectiveness of a structured, industry-led approach to transformation. The growth of the citrus industry was also recognised by President Cyril Ramaphosa in his State of the Nation Address earlier this year. Yet, in citrus terms, ten years is only the beginning. It can take between five and fifteen years for a citrus tree to reach full production. Many of the orchards planted at the GDC's inception are only now entering their most productive phase.



This long horizon reinforces an important lesson: meaningful transformation in agriculture is not immediate, but it is enduring when built on strong foundations. It requires patience, resilience, and cooperation.

As we look ahead, the focus of the GDC is clear. The next decade must be about deepening and scaling what has been built. This includes strengthening enterprise development through partnerships and joint ventures, improving market readiness and compliance, expanding access to innovative and blended finance, and integrating growers more fully into the value chain beyond primary production.

At the same time, there is an increasing emphasis on sustainability, data-driven decision-making, and resilience in the face of climate, market, and logistical pressures. The goal is not only to support more growers, but to ensure that those already in the system become fully competitive, commercially viable participants in global markets.

While transformation is complex and often challenging, the past ten years have shown that it is both possible and rewarding. The progress achieved is not symbolic; it is measurable, practical, and visible in growing enterprises, expanding orchards, and strengthened rural economies.

The foundation has been laid. The next decade is about building on that foundation to ensure that transformation is not only sustained, but accelerated.



COLLABORATION THE PARTNERSHIPS THAT HELP US GROW

Strategic partnerships have always been at the heart of the Grower Development Company's work, and as the GDC enters its second decade, these collaborations are becoming even more important in shaping how the organisation supports growers in a practical and sustainable way. Two recent partnerships highlight this fundamental truth, and also functions as examples of how the GDC's cooperative network includes both the private and the public sector.

One of our most recent partnerships is with Khula!, an agri-tech platform that connects farmers to markets, inputs, and financing opportunities. Khula operates as a digital ecosystem built around four key tools: a central dashboard for farm management, an Inputs App for sourcing agricultural supplies, a Trader App that allows farmers to secure buyers before harvest, and a Money App that connects growers to multiple funders through a single application. Together, these tools streamline production, improve market access, and unlock more efficient pathways to funding. At its core, this partnership is about helping growers move from potential to full commercial participation by strengthening the foundations of their businesses.



Over the years, one of the most consistent challenges has been access to funding. Many growers have strong operations but are not always considered "fund-ready" by financial institutions. Together, the GDC and Khula! are working to close this gap. Through structured pre- and post-investment support, growers are better prepared not only to access funding, but to use it effectively and sustainably.





This support begins well before any funding is secured. It includes project planning, due diligence, compliance checks, and technical assessments to ensure that each enterprise is set up for success. Once funding is in place, the focus shifts to ongoing mentorship, market access, logistics support, and meeting certification requirements. Khula's platform further strengthens this ecosystem by improving market visibility and helping growers better understand and respond to demand.

Alongside funding and enterprise development, partnerships in infrastructure are equally critical. In the Eastern Cape, the GDC has partnered with the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) to support the refurbishment of the Ripplemead Packhouse, owned by the Keiskamma Citrus Valley Cooperative (KVCV).

For growers in the region, this packhouse has come to represent a gateway to market access. However, infrastructure constraints have limited its ability to operate at full capacity. Through this partnership, funding has been secured for the first phase of refurbishment, which will address key structural gaps and create space for an expanded packing line.

Work is set to begin at the end of the current packing season and will include construction upgrades as well as the installation of additional machinery. While this is only the first phase, it marks a meaningful step towards improving efficiency and enabling the facility to support more growers over time.

Taken together, these partnerships reflect how the GDC is evolving. The focus is no longer only on supporting individual farms, but on building the systems around them, from finance and markets to infrastructure, that allow growers to succeed in the long term.

It is through partnerships like these that transformation becomes tangible; something that is lived, built, and sustained across the citrus industry.



khula!





TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Across South Africa's citrus regions, the most encouraging progress is often seen not in a single season, but in the steady development of farming enterprises over time. Through collaboration, mentorship, and sustained technical support, growers continue to build businesses that contribute meaningfully to both the strength of the citrus industry and the communities in which they operate.

One of the GDC's biggest achievements over the last 10 years has been our dedication to working alongside growers at different stages of development, supporting the practical foundations that enable long-term participation in commercial citrus production. This distinguishes the GDC from other development frameworks because our focus is not just on production outcomes, but on strengthening the technical capabilities, confidence, and decision-making capacity that allow black-owned citrus enterprises to grow sustainably.

In the Sundays River Valley, the progress of participants linked to GDC-supported transformation projects, Sundays River Farming Trust and Sikhula Sonke Enterprises, reflects the value of sustained partnership. Over many years, growers have developed their skills through structured mentorship, exposure to export markets, and ongoing technical guidance. Today, these enterprises manage significant citrus plantings across multiple farms, supported by access to agronomic expertise, market integration, and business support systems. The journey from early-stage participation to managing productive orchards illustrates how capability develops gradually when growers are supported to build knowledge alongside experience.

For many of our growers, access to practical guidance has played an important role in strengthening production systems. Through regular study groups, growers engage with peers facing similar challenges, exchanging insights and advice on orchard management, cultivar performance, and yield optimisation. These engagements create opportunities for shared learning across regions, which truly reinforces the collaborative nature of the citrus industry.

One-on-one extension support further enables tailored responses to the unique conditions of each farm, ensuring that production decisions are aligned with both environmental conditions and market requirements.





The value of long-term collaboration is also evident in Citrusdal, where Cedar Citrus, another GDC-backed transformation enterprise, continues to build on more than two decades of success in commercial citrus production. Working as part of a broader farming system, the enterprise manages over 120 hectares of citrus, producing more than 5,500 tons of fruit annually. Integration into established production and marketing networks has supported consistent growth, enabling participants to strengthen both operational capacity and long-term planning. The enterprise demonstrates how shared participation in a functioning commercial environment can contribute to stability and reinvestment over time.

Across projects, growers have benefited from structured support that considers the full lifecycle of citrus production. Establishing orchards requires patience, as newly planted trees take several years before reaching optimal yield. During this period, access to technical guidance and business planning support is particularly important. By aligning production decisions with long-term market opportunities, growers are able to position their enterprises for future growth.

The GDC's approach recognises that sustainable participation in citrus production depends on both technical and institutional support. Assistance with orchard management, cultivar selection, and yield improvement is complemented by support in areas such as business planning, governance readiness, and market compliance. Information days and stakeholder engagements provide opportunities for growers to connect with financial institutions, technical experts, and industry partners, strengthening the network of relationships that supports ongoing development.



Citrus Growers Association
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA



Data collection and performance benchmarking further contribute to informed decision-making, enabling growers to track orchard performance, assess productivity trends, and identify areas for improvement. Over time, this strengthens the ability of enterprises to reinvest and adapt to changing conditions within the agricultural sector.

The progress seen across these initiatives reflects a shared commitment to building resilient citrus enterprises through partnership. As growers continue to refine production practices and expand plantings, the benefits of collaboration become increasingly visible, both in orchard performance and in the confidence with which participants engage in commercial agriculture.

The GDC, and the many avenues of support we offer, are what make the Company as successful as it is.

GROWING MORE THAN CITRUS: THE STORY OF MUDEN CITRUS

If you need any evidence of just how powerful transformation in agriculture can be, look no further than Mudén Citrus. Situated in KwaZulu-Natal, near Greytown and just a few kilometres from Mooi River, this family-run citrus enterprise has become a source of opportunity not only for the Zama family, but for the wider community around it.

At last year's GDC Indaba, we had the opportunity to hear directly from Comfort Zama, the owner of Mudén Citrus, alongside his son Mandiza. Reflecting on their journey, Comfort made it clear that while the farm's commercial success is important, its real impact is measured in the lives it has helped change.

"Yes, we benefit from building the business and making money. But more importantly, we benefit when we see the community in the valley being empowered, getting jobs, being able to look after their families," he said.

Today, Mudén Citrus employs more than 100 people on a permanent basis, and during harvest season, they employ a further 100 people. This level of job creation has had a tangible impact on the surrounding community, creating stability, supporting households, and opening up new opportunities for many families.

The farm itself reflects a broader story of adaptation and vision. The land on which Mudén Citrus is situated was historically used for sugarcane, but its favourable climate and location made it ideal for citrus production. Recognising this potential, it was transformed into a thriving citrus operation.



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A key part of Mudén Citrus's story is the relationship between father and son. Mandiza describes working with his father as "almost seamless."

Before joining the family business, Mandiza completed an apprenticeship with KMI Farms in Mpumalanga, where he gained hands-on experience across the full production cycle, from planting and pruning to irrigation. Now back on the farm, he is learning the business side of agriculture directly from his father, including funding, development, and long-term planning.

GROWING MORE THAN CITRUS: THE STORY OF MUDEN CITRUS

What stands out is the clear sense of continuity. Mandiza represents a new generation of farmers who are not only building on existing knowledge but also thinking ahead about how to integrate new technologies, including AI, into the future of citrus farming.

For Comfort, this transition is deeply meaningful. "It is the wish of every parent to see their child take over from them," he said. "To see him participating in the business gives me hope, and hope is life."

Citrus farming requires patience, commitment, and long-term thinking. In Comfort's words, "if you're a farmer, you must be spiritual." It is a reminder that this is not an industry of quick returns, but one that demands belief, resilience, and a deep connection to the land.

At Mudén Citrus, that commitment is visible in every orchard. With more than 220 orchards planted, the farm stands as a testament to years of careful planning and sustained effort. It is also a space of shared growth, where both Comfort and Mandiza continue to learn, adapt, and build together.

