

Effective technology transfer

– a key to assisting emerging farmers

The Limpopo province is well known for the production of various crops, e.g. subtropical fruits, citrus and macadamia nuts. This is possibly due to its various climatic conditions ranging from semi-arid to subtropical. The major fruit production areas are in Groblersdal, Hoedspruit, Tzaneen, Levubu and Messina.

Nomvuyu Matlala
SUBTROP

THE LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT of Agriculture and Rural Development (LDARD) is mandated to foster a unified and prosperous agricultural sector. The sector is characterised by well-established and skilled farmers while on the other side with resource poor and unskilled farmers.

In the endeavour to bridge the gap, the Department has various programmes to assist farmers with, amongst others, infrastructure development, production input support, agricultural and advisory services. However, the key to a successful farming business amongst others is knowledge of the specific crop under production.

In an attempt to address the knowledge gap of the farmers, the Department entered into a farmers/agricultural advisors capacity building partnership programme with commercial farmers' associations. The partnership, Effective Technology Transfer Programme on Fruit Production, is done in collaboration with respective stakeholders in the sectors. The programme is guided by a memorandum of understanding between LDARD and the South African Subtropical Growers Association (Subtrop).

At the beginning of every year, an annual farmers study group and extension officer training calendar is developed by LDARD and Subtrop for the Vhembe and Mopani district's aspirant subtropical fruit farmers. In addition to the above, the annual calendar also includes attendance of production workshops, research symposia and a farmers information day exposure.

The calendar focuses on Subtrop's four crops – avocado, mangoes, maca-

damia and litchi. Every crop has a study group session per quarter. Farmers under the leadership of local farmers are continuously encouraged to attend these sessions to gain knowledge for successful farming. The farmers are organised per crop and every group takes the responsibility to organise the planned event together with the local extension officer and Subtrop personnel.

The programme has gained popularity over the years as indicated in Table 1. The numbers indicated include both farmers and officials. Topics included irrigation, insect pest and disease management, fertilisation, orchard management and marketing.

On 21 September 2016, Allesbeste (Pty) Ltd in Tzaneen hosted a team of extension officers from LDARD. The mission was to provide practical knowledge and insights into the operation of a nursery and avocado orchard management. The team was given a thorough insight to producing an avocado tree, right from seed collection, treatment and germination to clonal rootstock and grafting. This process is the foundation for the establishment of an avocado orchard and successful farming.

To meet the ever increasing quality demand by consumers in international and local markets, orchard management plays a very important role. The visitors were taken through the farm for demonstrations of avocado tree pruning, protection against the sun, irrigation, land preparation, root disease control and land preparation, amongst others.

The team appreciated the effort in making the day a success and are looking forward to further engagement. ❖

Table 1. Summary of emerging avocado, mango, macadamia and litchi growers involved in study groups.

Crop	No. of attendees (2014/15)	No. of attendees (2009/10)
Litchi (2)	74	23
Macadamia (3)	76	20
Mango (2)	62	27
Avocado (3)	78	55
Total	290	125



Team observing avocado tree grafting.



Demonstration of clonal rootstock grafted seedling.



Discussion on capacity building to serve the sector better.

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