



Progress in the training of extension officers

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Subtrop has been involved in the development of the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (LDoA) extension officers through extension training for three years. Due to the large number of potential smallholder farmers in the Limpopo Province, it was deemed necessary to establish a training programme for government extension officers. The aim was to help them become hands-on with their growers. This comes after the LDoA had identified areas in which Subtrop could become actively involved in developing smallholder farmers in the Vhembe region. Most of the extension officers within the government structure tend to perform multiple roles, ranging from vegetable production to animal production to fruit production. This overload forces these officers to become general agriculture extension officers rather than being experts in a specific field. It

was for this reason that the Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Subtrop to train government extension co-ordinators in the Limpopo Province on the production of macadamias, avocados, litchis and mangoes.

The Vhembe region has great potential to increasing subtropical crop production and therefore, it is important for the industry to ensure that smallholder farmers are technically equipped with the basic agricultural production practices. This begins by equipping government extension officers with the necessary skills to be able to assist emerging growers of subtropical crops.

Vhembe region has the highest concentration of the emerging avocado, mango, litchi and macadamia growers and therefore is important to develop government extension officers in this region. Researchers (mainly from ARC-ITSC) and Subtrop technical staff are actively involved in this training. The extension officers therefore have the opportunity to learn the latest produc-

tion practices to enable them to assist their own growers.

Despite the challenges faced by the smallholders in the area, there is still huge potential for these farmers to move from emerging stage to commercial level. Getting quality technical advice from their extension officers can help them to increase their production. Subtrop believes that more support for emerging farmers will enable them to participate in commercial agriculture. Subtrop has since engaged the LDoA together with emerging farmers to assess the effectiveness of training. It was agreed that a survey will be conducted using a questionnaire which will be circulated to the emerging growers during study group meetings to give feedback about improvements seen since the onset of extension officer training. In addition, the extension officials, through a similar survey, will be asked whether the training is worthwhile for them and which areas would they like to focus on or improve on in future. **ST**



Dr Tertina Grové from the ARC-ITSC explains the economic importance of *Bactrocera invadens* (B.i.) in the subtropical fruit industry during a training session for extension officers.



Regina Cronjé from the ARC-ITSC detailing the most important orchard management practices.