

Trustee training

Potatoes SA recently made an important investment in Black Empowerment in the Ceres/Koue Bokkeveld area by sponsoring the training of trustees from several empowerment projects.



The training was provided by the Koue Bokkeveld Training Centre to:

- Harmony Trust (Môrester Estate)
- Themba Trust (Bronaar Farms)
- Crispy Coolers/Farms (Du Toit Group)
- Morceaux (Laastedrif Estate)
- Aborlane and Langewyde (Langrivier Estate)

The programme started off with a team building weekend where the trustees identified their weaknesses and strengths, learned from each other

and generated enthusiasm for an otherwise daunting task. The team building was followed by three day sessions where they focussed on financial literacy, more complicated calculations and discussing the realities of shareholding. They confronted the reality that many empowerment projects fail and were provided with guidelines that would enable them to avoid making similar mistakes. The feedback from all the trustees was most favourable. They reported that they gained a realistic and serious perspective of their responsibilities. They know the pitfalls as well as the need for proper management.

Lack of trust can be a serious stumbling block in these projects and was one of the major problems identified by trustees. Both shareholders and their commercial partners find it difficult to talk openly about these trust issues. During the training programme, mistrust, suspicion and the motives behind the project were discussed from all angles.

With this contribution Potatoes SA offered an invaluable opportunity to empowerment beneficiaries - greatly increasing their chances of success.



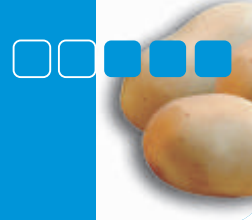
Lowveld Agricultural College students start planting

(Article and photos: Diale Mokgojwa)



Johan Holtzhasen explaining to the students how potatoes are graded.

As from July 2007 potatoes were introduced to first year students at Lowveld Agricultural College as part of their practical crop from where they can learn about production practices, pests and diseases, integrated management of pests and diseases amongst other things. The initiative is part of the Skills Development Pipeline strategy of Potatoes South Africa (PSA). In terms of the strategy, students will be introduced to potatoes at tertiary level, where they will be afforded the opportunity to develop their technical skills through



practical training and assessment coupled with exposure through excursions to various entities within the potato value chain. The strategy further involves using the College platform as a centre from where cultivar trials are planted to train and develop students as future farmers, employees and business people as these institutions have the infrastructure and systems that are suitable for such purposes.

In July 2007 Johan Holtzhausen, Diale Mokgojwa and Samuel Soko, a crop technician at the college, were assisted by the college staff to plant a trial using various cultivars viz. Mondial, Shepody, Pentland Dell, Frodo, Hertha, BP1, Valor, Harmony, Caren and Up-to-date. When the students arrived after their vacation, they immediately had to plant their own ten metre double rows from where they have been assessed. The whole experience had been an eye opener for the students and the college as it has generated a lot of interest towards the crop. The capacity building exercise also involved utilising the services of Israel Mashile from Bayer Crop Science who imparted knowledge on the types of diseases and pests, their control measures and the technical application of Bayer Crop Science products.

On 25 October 2007 the students had to make group presentations where they were assessed by a panel of crop production lecturers including PSA. The students were divided into five groups and given their assignments which were as follows:

- Group A- occurrence and control of viral diseases
- Group B- occurrence and control of bacterial diseases
- Group C- occurrence and control of fungal diseases
- Group D- occurrence and control of pests
- Group E- integrated approach to pests and disease management

After the theoretical presentations in the lecture halls, the students made presentations on the field in front of their individual rows. What was exciting about the practical exercise is that the students had taken ownership of their own crop, could identify the pest, viral and bacterial damages on their crops. The students took this as a learning curve and will most certainly do better next year. It is envisaged that as from 2008 potatoes will be integrated into the theoretical curriculum of the college.

The college platform presents us with many opportunities as we are able to impart knowledge and skills to the students - some of whom might choose to

further their careers in the potato industry. It further enables us to identify potential farmers and develop them with the knowledge that they have a good foundation on theory and experiential training. On 16 November 2007 the cultivar trial was harvested and students were further trained on post harvesting steps. These included handling potatoes after harvesting, sorting, grading and packaging. The students were very proud of their crop as seen on the photo below.

C



Lowveld Agricultural College students making group presentations.



Lowveld Agricultural College students proudly holding some of their first potato crop.