

New tissue culture facility opens in the Western Cape

A state-of-the-art Tissue Culture Facility (TCF) has been opened by Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Dr Ivan Meyer, at Bernheim Farm, outside Paarl.



Image Supplied | From left to right: Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Ivan Meyer, opened the facility by ceremoniously 'tilling the soil'. From left: Minister Meyer, Anton Rabe (TCF Chairman), Charmaine Stander (TCF Manager), Dr Mbgale Sebopetsa (HOD WCDA) and André Smit (TCF Project Manager).

The initiative, driven by the South African deciduous fruit industry, is an effort to keep up with international trends and to make sure local producers have access to world-class plant material.

The facility will support the table grape, wine grape, raisin, pome, and stone fruit industries. Where capacity is available, other commodities would also be included in operational plans. The deciduous fruit industry hopes that the facility will mainly focus on and address the shortage of available rootstocks and ensure quick multiplication of desired plant material for the various sectors.

The TCF will supply industry with clonal rootstocks grown through rapid multiplication of in-vitro plant material. This will ensure that enough plant material is supplied to the SA deciduous industry at a lower price than through imported material that is currently available to the industry.

Apart from loan funding provided by the shareholder commodity groups, the initiative is supported with a R10m investment injection by the WCDA.

Driving agricultural growth

Meyer said at the opening that unlocking the potential of technology and creating capacity for agriculture are key drivers in growing the sector. "We believe in partnerships and collaboration. What makes the industry TCF initiative more impressive is that it is not tied to one commodity but it will

service industry as a whole which will benefit all producers."

Meyer said that 55% of South Africa's agricultural exports are produced in the Western Cape. "We have great potential; we have to think big. That is why farmer support, market access, increased exports and job creation, especially for women, are key focus areas."

"We need to ensure the safety and security of the farming industry and to bring wellbeing and dignity back to our people. One way of achieving this is by creating jobs for women, and I am happy to see that there are already many women working here at the TCF."

Mitigating phytosanitary risks

Charmaine Stander, TCF Manager, said that new generation genetics (cultivars and rootstocks) will be multiplied at the facility. This will enable the industry to compete and penetrate discerning world markets. "This includes Africa as a key focus, within the Southern African Development Community context, with South Africa as a gateway to providing phytosanitary accredited plant material. In this regard, it will establish the Western Cape as a technology leader in the global industry."

Anton Rabe, chairman of the TCF, said that the facility will also mitigate phytosanitary risks by supplying virus-free in-vitro plant material to the industry. Phytosanitary risks are often associated with infected plant material.

Enhancing industry quality

"As an industry, we are following a global trend with the establishment of the latest technology, capacity and expertise for our stakeholders. This is also a strategic investment that will result in making available a better offering to IP owners and agents interested in licensing their material locally via industry structures. TCF also aims to establish an accredited quarantine capacity within the facility which will assist both importing and exporting the latest cultivars and rootstock for its clients."

According to Rabe, it will also enhance the quality of plant material to the grapevine industry as per the aspirations of the table grape/raisin industries to regenerate high-quality foundation and mother blocks.

"With the support of WCDA we can realise this vision to the advantage of the fruit industry at large. We are extremely grateful for their contribution and

support in this long term project."

- Currently Hortgro Stone, Hortgro Pome, the Canning Producers' Association, the South African Table Grape Industry, Raisins SA and SAPO Trust are shareholders in the TCF.
- TCF envisage beginning with commercial production in 2021.
- Charmaine Stander will head up the operation and will be supported by Gizela Saal on the technology side. They will make a formidable team and the TCF is happy to have them on board.

For more information, contact [André Smit](#) and [Charmaine Stander](#).

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