

New citrus qualification for high school students launched

As the academic year commences, the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has announced a groundbreaking initiative – high schools across South Africa will now offer a qualification in citrus production. In 2024, over 450 students at 16 schools will be enrolled in the innovative Citrus Secondary programme. Spearheaded by the Citrus Academy, a CGA subsidiary, this programme presents a unique opportunity for learners to achieve a recognised plant production qualification while still in high school.



Source: tarkovskybilly via [Pixabay](#)

The initiative is specifically rolled out in citrus-producing regions, with participation from schools in various areas, including Bonnievale and Riversdal in the Western Cape, Patensie, Kirkwood, and Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape, Umzimkulu in KwaZulu-Natal, Kakamas in the Northern Cape, and Hoedspruit, N'wanitwa, and Tzaneen in the Limpopo province.

This educational opportunity is facilitated over two years and is aimed at Grade 10 and 11 learners. The modules are timed to coincide with the citrus production cycle. Learners are introduced to topics such as enterprise planning, irrigation, financial management, pest management and plant manipulation.

The programme is also fully curriculum-aligned and can be used as part of the school subject Agricultural Management Practices, or it can be implemented as an extramural activity through which learners can attain a valuable qualification.

Transforming the industry

Jacomien de Klerk, general manager of the Citrus Academy, explains further: "It opens a path into an industry that can offer so many opportunities. It addresses a challenge that many school-leavers unfortunately face: having few marketable skills while not having access to tertiary education." She also says Citrus Secondary supports its goals to continue the transformation of the citrus industry and create a whole new, passionate generation of entrants into the sector.

Last year the programme was piloted in two schools in the Sunday's River Valley, as well as one in Humansdorp. "We've learned so much about how to make the programme work practically during the pilot phase, but what we found out was that there is an immense interest in and need for this type of qualification. In one school, registrations doubled as things progressed," says Theo Bezuidenhout, a Community Development Co-ordinator from the Sundays River Valley Collaborative, a non-profit company.

"This is about recalibrating the current education system, working with the local community and local government so that the system can have a systemic effect on things like employment prospects."

The CGA's Citrus Academy will provide the programme's content, assessment and administration, utilising the Academy's e-learning platform. Through it, learners can also access supporting information, videos and sound clips, and engage with interactive material.

The citrus industry in South Africa exported 165.1 million (15kg) cartons for delivery to global markets in 2023. It sustains 140,000 livelihoods on farm level and brings in over R30bn a year in export revenue. Projections indicate the industry can grow with a further 100,000 jobs in the next eight years if all role-players work together to secure increased market access and improved export logistics.

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