

Rooibos industry forms collective forum

The newly-established South African Rooibos Council is a long-planned initiative that aims to ensure a cohesive and internationally competitive rooibos industry. Tricia Fitchet reports.

Representative of all stakeholders in the value chain, farmers, packers and marketers, the new South African Rooibos Council (SARC) aims to foster sustainable development in the industry and optimise export earnings from rooibos products.

Although the rooibos industry cultivates approximately 36 000 ha and averages production of 8 000 tons pa, this is the first time it will have a representative body and an integrated approach to common issues.

'The rooibos industry in the Western Cape is relatively small with companies all doing their own thing,' comments Martin Bergh, MD of Rooibos Ltd (the largest supplier and marketer of rooibos internationally) and the chairman of the SARC. 'We want to develop the industry in a sustainable manner by combining strategy and production.'

With local per capita consumption of rooibos at 0,8kg pa, the SARC is looking to increase market share of rooibos products nationally and internationally.

Members are made up of the 400 rooibos farmers in Clanwilliam as well as packers such as National Brands, Unilever, Joekels and smaller participants.

Black empowerment is an ongoing challenge: 'There's very little BEE in the industry and achieving the right balance is a big question. We have always had so-called "coloured" rooibos farmers (13% of the producers delivering to Rooibos Ltd are previously disadvantaged), but the difficulty lies in reaching the 30% level set by government because traditionally there are no black farmers in this industry,' says Bergh.