

Succession stories in the citrus industry

The Peter Family Trust

The Peter Family Trust Farm is situated on the broad, fertile flood plain of the Gamtoos River at Rooidraai, a few kilometres south of Hankey. It's owned by the Peter family (since 2004). By Gloria Weare (adapted from Louise Brodie)

Approximately half of the beautiful 36 ha Peter Family Trust farm is under citrus. And despite several setbacks, the hard work and perseverance of the family is producing good results. Determined members of the next generation of the Peter Family have joined them.

Jack Peter is chairman and beneficiary of the Peter Trust. His daughters Nokuzola Pitana and Nomaxabiso Peter are also very involved in the farm. Nomakhaya Peter, who is the daughter of Godukile Peter is another beneficiary of the trust. All the women proudly wear overalls with "Peter Family Trust" in bold print. Jack Peter is grateful for the help from the younger family members. "These strong, committed young women do all the work and

are really making things happen here for us," says Jack. "They prune the trees themselves and they have also dug furrows on the farm when necessary. I do not know what we would have done without them."

The members of the Peter Family Trust were all employed by Tertius Meyer at Mandarin Farm when they heard about the possibility of buying this farm. Jack Peter explains: "The trust was formed, as this was part of the required process to buy the farm. We each received R20 000 from the Department of Land Affairs grant scheme, and together we bought the property. As there was a shortfall of R600 000, we borrowed this from the Land Bank to make up the difference. We received the farm in



2004 and then seven of the men from the family trust started working on the farm. When we took over the farm the trees were five years old."

Initially, there were 12 members of the family trust; three have since passed away.

Unfortunately, the Peters only purchased the land but had no implements, which made it virtually impossible for successful production. As things regressed, the Land Bank wanted to repossess the farm. The women from the family trust joined the men in working the farm, and the family made an appeal to the Land Bank. In addition to the citrus, they were also farming with vegetables at the time and had 10 ha under pivot irrigation and 4 ha under drag line irrigation, which provided them with a modest income.

The Peter family trust won the Female Farm Worker of the Year award, hosted by the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture twice, in 2004 and 2007. Their R50 000 prize money assisted them to prepare their fruit for

the following harvest. Though their fruit was exported that year, it reached the market in a bad condition, costing them their anticipated export income. As a result, they'd incurred debt at the packhouse and co-operative for the packing of the fruit, which they were unable to pay. Without capital, they could not maintain the farm and watched helplessly as their orchards went to ruin. For some years they let the farm to a local commercial farmer and this assisted them for a while.

But circumstances have since improved for the Peter Family. They are farming their own land and after many years of waiting for assistance from the government, The Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture provided them with the funding to construct a new shed on the farm in 2017. They also received lemon trees from the CGA Grower Development Company for five additional hectares. And government has provided them with the fertiliser and crop protection chemicals required to plant these new trees. They've also received funding to cover the cost of improving the farming infrastructure by installing an irrigation system and a new pump.

Says Peter: "Patensie Citrus packs our fruit and markets the fruit on our behalf and we have a good relationship with them. Things have certainly improved. A few years ago we were also able to purchase a second-hand bakkie. Our family lives in Hankey and before we had this vehicle, we walked the 7 km from Hankey to here and back every day."

There is a total of eight people working on the farm: the three beneficiaries of the Jack Family Trust, namely Jack Peter, his wife Hazel Peter and Godukile Peter, as well as five of their children.

"We work the farm with our adult children and they help us as we are getting older," explains Jack Peter. "We hope to fill an entire 10 ha section with citrus."

Nokuzola Pitana is Jack and Hazel Peter's daughter. She is 38 years old and has four children. "I matriculated at Hankey Secondary and then studied Business Management at the Bethalsdorp Technical College in 1998 and 1999. I have been involved with the farming business from when the Peter Family Trust was established in 2004. For a period of four years I left the

Far left: Beautiful view of citrus orchards at Patensie. Left top: The women at the Peter Family Trust Farm wear their work uniforms with pride. Left below: Peter Family Trust team members in orchard: Nokuzola Peter, Jack Peter, Nomakhaya Peter and Nomaxabiso Peter.

farm to earn an additional income. However, after that I returned home again to help with the farm and have been working on the farm ever since. I have completed my business management course, and my next goal is to do a BCom degree."

Nomaxabiso Peter is Jack and Hazel Peter's younger daughter who joined the farm after matriculating. She is 29 and matriculated at Douglas Mbobha Secondary School in Gqeberha (previously, Port Elizabeth).

Nomakhaya Peter is the daughter of Godukile Peter. She is also 29 and matriculated at Hankey High School. She has been working on the farm for eight years.

This is clearly a caring and close family, committed to each other. And, as when Jack described how much the young women assist them on the farm, they all laughingly agreed and added: "Yes, he makes us work very hard!"

"Farming is not easy," says Nokuzola. "We work on the farm full-time and we really only receive survival wages, but we are okay with this as our aim is to help the older generation and to learn about farming from them. We love this farm as we grew up seeing our parents produce citrus here, and we have invested our future in this. We are very happy working on the farm because we enjoy what we do. Our long-term goal is to expand our orchards further and we are excited about the future of our farm. There is currently a high rate of unemployment in our country and our farm provides a business opportunity for us, and when it is properly established, it will also provide opportunities for our children in the future."