

REPORT

—Social responsibility



# Transformation offers hope

CAPE TOWN—Political rhetoric in South Africa often takes the focus off the quiet revolution that is taking place on many of the country's farms, led by companies like Capespan.

by Fred Meintjes

**W**hile politicians in South Africa debate the next round of land transformation details that are likely to have a major impact of the fruit sector, growers and companies involved in the industry are continuing their quiet revolution through the introduction of shareholding and development projects on farms.

One such group is Capespan, which, through its Blue Hand initiative, is involved in development projects across numerous fruit communities nationwide. One of the places serving as a good example of the scheme's work is on Capespan's farms in the Northern Cape region. These are all located in the Orange River table grape region where EUROFRUIT, on a recent visit, also found many other stories of hope and transformation.

"We have certainly reached many milestones along the road to making a difference and affecting the lives of people in the most progressive way over the past ten years," says Ansonnete van der Merwe, coordinator of the project. "With a relationship dating back to 2007 when 2,000 trees were planted in an unforgiving landscape to green the farms, improvements on

Capespan's Northern Cape farms have been substantial. Today, six age-appropriate Blue Hand day-care centres – either renovated or brand new – accommodate farm workers' 200 pre-school children."

Van der Merwe says that, to ensure a recognised educational programme is followed, the initiative facilitates training and educating day-care personnel annually. As a result, about 200 women with dependent pre-school children are able to pursue employment, thereby expanding gender equality on grape farms and, by default, enhancing children's exposure to quality educational content.

"We started small in 2009 by improving basic amenities in day-care centres such as installing toilets, basins, ceilings, fences and lawns at play areas. In the ensuing years Blue Hand concentrated on maintenance, training of staff and educational support services. Three years later, two brand-new crèche facilities at Noudonies and Arendsnes farms in the Orange River opened their doors to little feet thanks to our alliance with the Waitrose Foundation. In 2016 water-coolant air-conditioning systems were installed at six centres. In 2017 mothers at Noriseep and Oorkant Valam heaved a sigh of relief after renovations to existing buildings resulted in much-needed crèche facilities," she outlines. In addition, in 2010 an initiative called Care Works was introduced to all farms to develop HIV/Aids awareness and health counselling for staff members while simultaneously training 22 representatives to operate as workplace HIV/Aids peer educators.

"This is not where our involvement ends," van der Merwe continues. "Subsequently, construction of cooking structures commenced on four farms, followed by the same for a further six farms in 2011. The remain-

der of that year was spent on health education and training for peer educators, life skills and preventative hygiene and health-care training for crèche staff, a voluntary HIV/Aids testing campaign and pre-school/crèche educational toys and resources for 11 day-care centres."

In 2015 Capespan Blue Hand also started with a vegetable tunnel project which is managed by farm worker committees on five farms to provide food supplements for farm workers and to contribute to vitamin-enriched porridge at day centres for children. It forms part of preventative health care and is managed in association with a non-government organisation called Food for the Nations," she concludes. **E**

TOP—A daycare facility backed by Capespan's Blue Hand initiative