



## Association to Boost Training in Forestry

The **Forest Industry Training Providers Association (FITPA)**, which provides a platform for accredited forestry training service providers, has been officially launched.

The formation of an association representing training service providers has been sorely needed according to industry stakeholders, and was specifically requested by the government education and training authority, FIETA.

Moves to establish FITPA began towards the end of 2006 with Derek Howe as the interim chairman. The fledgling organisation's first AGM took place in Pietermaritzburg in November last year. An executive committee was elected with Russel Meaker taking over from Derek as chairman. The other committee members are Roy Wilson (secretary and treasurer), and regional representatives Ashley Diack (KZN and Free State) and Deon Brits Jnr (Mpumalanga and Limpopo). A representative for the Cape region still has to be elected.

The meeting was well attended by accredited training service providers, as well as a number of training providers who are currently applying for accreditation through FIETA.

The **primary objectives of the Association** are to:-

- assure a high quality of training within the forestry industry
- liaise with FIETA – where required - regarding the accreditation of training service providers
- develop channels of communication between training providers and relevant government bodies such as FIETA, Dept. Of Labour, DWAF, SAQA, etc.
- participate in the ongoing development and revision of unit standards and qualifications and, where possible, to facilitate other joint projects and initiatives which will benefit the industry as a whole
- mentor and capacitate emerging black training service providers seeking accreditation

The formation of FITPA has been welcomed by industry stakeholders who believe it will contribute to the **quality and quantity of skills training taking place in the industry.**

According to Ashley Diack, FITPA's KZN representative and joint-owner of KwaMahlali Training Services, there are concerns around the level of skills among forestry workers in South Africa and FITPA will make it easier to co-ordinate the activities of training service providers, growers, contractors and government.

Ashley said that appropriate training for forestry workers was demanded both by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and NOSA, and that it could have a big impact on productivity, safety and the management of environmental impacts.

He said that the outsourcing of forestry work by the growers over the past few years had had a negative impact on forest worker skills as there was not enough funding available for training, and many contractors did not invest in the long term development of forestry workers.

However the situation is improving with FIETA launching another extended SMME funding project which provides free training for SMME contractors in scarce and critical skills. A number of corporates have also established training schemes whereby a portion of a contractors' budget is retained in a trust and made available to the contractor for training purposes.

Membership of the newly-formed training provider's association is totally voluntary. It is a fully inclusive, non-profit organisation which all providers of training in the forestry and related industries are encouraged to join. Any enquiries regarding membership should be directed to Roy Wilson on (033) 846 3800

### **Free chainsaw training for forestry co-op workers**

Members of Siyathuthuka Timber Co-op in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands are upgrading their forestry skills thanks to a Forest Industries Education and Training Authority (FIETA) programme aimed at improving scarce skills among small forestry enterprises.

FIETA has provided the funding for the basic chainsaw training that Co-op members situated in the Ozwathini area near Greytown have been undergoing.

The courses are being run by a FIETA accredited service provider, Kwamahlati Training Services. The course entails ten days of intensive training including both theoretical as well as practical components. The training is conducted in accordance with a number of applicable unit standards, and equips the learners with a nationally-recognised certificate of competence.

A major problem encountered by the trainers was that the trainees did not have the correct protective clothing. Fortunately Stihl came to the rescue and sponsored the safety gear for 28 people, as well as sufficient chainsaws to enable the training to proceed

SA Forestry visited two groups of six people busy training in wattle woodlots belonging to members of the Co-Op. While the trainees were receiving instruction in felling and de-limbing the trees, other members of the Co-op were following behind de-barking and gathering the strips into bundles. These are then hauled to the Co-op's depot where they are weighed and stacked, awaiting transport to the mills.

Conditions on the ground are quite difficult with hilly terrain and few roads. However forestry is apparently flourishing in the area with extensive stands of mainly wattle growing between the scattered homesteads.