Press release: Van Rensburg supports biotechnology

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Illustration: Photo by Wouter Kriel

W-Genetwister1: Tania Lerm, Genetwister Project Manager: Tissue Culture, explains the finer points of *in vitro* plant propagation to Gerrit van Rensburg, Western Cape Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Body: “Agriculture needs cutting edge technology in order to remain competitive and profitable”, Gerrit van Rensburg, Western Cape Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, said during a visit to the new facility of South African company Genetwister Africa outside Stellenbosch. The Western Cape Government, through Wesgro, is assisting Genetwister in establishing itself in the province.

Genetwister is a biotechnology company that provides the agricultural sector with accessible biotechnological services and tools to improve the quality of agri- and horticultural products. Genetwister is a world leader in the development of biomarkers for various breeding applications and for the development of diagnostic tests. These include the accurate determination of optimal harvest dates and storage potential of various deciduous fruits. Due to the reliable predictive value of these tests, users are able to select products with confidence for specific markets or storage periods allowing cost effective planning, improved overall fruit quality of export consignments, catering for specific market needs and eliminating export of fruit with inadequate storage potential, reducing waste, amongst others.

Genetwister also offers plant tissue culture and biotechnology research services. Clients can make use of a combination of these services, e.g. marker assisted breeding together with embryo rescue procedures and micro-propagation, to significantly enhance and speed up the process of developing new cultivars.

Dr Reinette Champanis, Genetwister Operations Manager, said their technology significantly reduces the number of years it takes to commercialize new varieties of crops, as desirable characteristics can be identified and selected on a molecular level. This eliminates time consuming and expensive breeding and cultivating trials.

Van Rensburg said that the global market is consumer driven, and new varieties of produce are constantly demanded. International buyers are demanding higher levels of quality, product consistency, and longer shelf life. “We need to embrace technology which will allow us to respond quicker to these market signals; otherwise we will be left behind by our competitors”.

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