



agriculture & rural development

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Weenen to get chicory roaster for local coffee

WEENEN is set to become the source of many a cup of instant coffee after the state-funded Agribusiness Development Agency (ADA) last week committed to install a roaster in the town to service the growing chicory agricultural sector in the uThukela District.

This was announced on the sidelines at the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) last week between global dairy products manufacturer Nestlé and the Eastern Cape government and the Department of Trade and Industry.

The five-year memorandum aims to increase the current 7 500 tonne chicory harvest to 8 700 tonnes, creating 870 extra jobs. Emerging farmers were also being mentored to enter the market to boost the production of chicory, which is widely used in Nestlé's Ricoffy brand.

KZN agricultural MEC Cyril Xaba said the Weenen roaster would reduce costs for the KZN-based farmers. "A challenge so far is that the dried chicory has had to be transported to the Eastern Cape to be roasted. This has increased the cost.

"To overcome this problem, ADA bought a roaster so that the roasting can be done in Weenen and the roasted chicory sold to Nestlé (which has a plant in Estcourt)," said Xaba. Roasting is set to start in the next few months.

Xaba said the chicory project began in 2008 when Nestlé, which owns the Nescafe brand, "started looking to grow chicory near its Estcourt factory, as a way of lessening its dependence on exports from India. The project started on a small scale initially, with trials to test whether our heavy, clayish soils would be suitable. The challenge going forward has been to work towards achieving higher yields with the ultimate aim that Nestlé would not have to import but have all its chicory needs met in South Africa," said Xaba.

• The carrot-like root of the chicory plant is used as a coffee substitute, although dairy farmers are increasingly also planting the hardy, broad-leaved plant as cattle feed. — WR.