

Afagri makes the ride easier

AFGRI has long been associated with the apple project run by farmers of the Bethlehem Farmers' Trust (BFT). This business was funded by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and by grants from the Free State government. Founded seven years ago, it was one of the first pilot projects intended to foster public-private partnership in agriculture.

In terms of the company's commitment to developing commercial agriculture, Afagri provides management support to the project. Now, to make life easier for the 74 farmers who travel out to the project daily, Afagri has invested R500 000 in a bus. The bus will ensure that the beneficiaries of the venture, who also work on the farm and in the pack house, are transported in dignity to and from their homes.

"Both support of the BFT venture and our establishment of a supply chain hub in Bethlehem, demonstrate our commitment to the central eastern Free State," says Dr Moji Mogari, Afagri director of corporate affairs.

The brightly branded bus was recently handed over to the BFT by Afagri Corporate Affairs coordinator Tebogo Mahapa. It was a day of celebration and fun for family members and beneficiaries of the enterprise, which is one that continues to im-



MR JOSEPH MLANGENI, chairman of the Bethlehem Farmers Trust (BFT), Ms Tebogo Mahapa, Afagri, and Mr Pieter Rourie, project manager BFT, at the new bus.

prove the lives of the community in Bethlehem. Though beset by structural challenges and climate-related problems in 2004 and 2005, the enterprise is now on a stable footing.

The BFT achieved its first operating profit in the 2006-'07 financial year, when the orchard carried record tonnages of a quality that was well received by both local and offshore markets. Contributing to this quality crop was the acquisition of high tech frost control equipment from New Zealand, the BFT having

been the first South African apple orchard to have installed such equipment.

"Afagri's commitment and continued involvement have seen this venture evolving from a typical community project to a fully fledged commercial enterprise over the last three years," says Mogari.

A new management agreement to extend Afagri's term is currently being negotiated. The crop volume estimate and market outlook for the current season is very positive.

