

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS / LOGISTICS

Citrus industry urges stronger biosecurity

27 Feb 2026 - By Lyse Comins



Source: My Food Diary



The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has emphasised the critical role of biosecurity in protecting agriculture and supporting export-led economic growth, drawing lessons from the ongoing Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak.

CGA chief executive, Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, writing in his newsletter on Friday, highlighted Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen's focus on resolving the FMD crisis as an opportunity to prioritise biosecurity across the sector.

"The focus of the Minister of Agriculture to resolve the FMD outbreak is something that, although a crisis, offers opportunity to make the concern with biosecurity front and centre in our sector," Ntshabele remarked.

He said he had observed the Minister's frustration during a recent parliamentary presentation, regarding problems his department is having with non-compliance with movement controls.

"I listened closely when the Minister, in a presentation to parliament this past week, expressed frustration with non-compliance to movement controls – where animals are moved out of disease management zones (subject to FMD infection and implemented controls) to free areas and risking the further spread of the disease."

Ntshabele described this as "a great opportunity for us in citrus to observe and learn, as we could also in the future be affected by a harmful disease: Asian Citrus Greening, also known as HuangLongBing (HLB)."

He said the Minister had underscored biosecurity as one of the seven priorities of his department, which "deserves complete support".

Ntshabele said biosecurity was the responsibility of everyone but border control was paramount, particularly against illegal migration and unintended entry of pests and diseases. Uncontrolled trade and smuggled goods, including plant material or trees, posed risks to entry of infectious material.

"Agriculture has contributed immensely to the country's economy through exports, and biosecurity is the very basis on which goods are moved: trade between countries is premised on the exporting country meeting sanitary and phytosanitary requirements of the importing country.

"Sound biosecurity practices give trade firmer assurance and thus wider access for exports," said Ntshabele.

He said biosecurity should underpin entire farm operations, with farmers bearing primary responsibility.

Ntshabele warned against complacency regarding HLB, which has decimated citrus production in parts of the US and poses serious challenges in South America.

"The biggest challenge with biosecurity often stems from a lackadaisical approach where the general belief is that the disease is far away – and thus far from a problem – and yet farms receive guests and goods from elsewhere in the world."

He referenced last year's National Biosecurity Summit as an important event uniting stakeholders, improving communication and coordination.

"Fundamentally, all citizens need to be informed of their role in ensuring biosecurity.

"It is a year later and perhaps time to reflect on outcomes realised there. How much have we implemented and what still needs to be done? Unless we focus on better alignment, we remain dangerously exposed, to the detriment of agriculture as we know it, the creator of jobs and livelihoods in rural South Africa – a critical engine in growing our economy."

The CGA tasked the Citrus Research Institute (CRI) with managing citrus biosecurity several years ago.

“We should be grateful for work undertaken by the Biosecurity Division of the CRI, and we should continue supporting its leading role in protecting growers against pest and disease incursions, working jointly with department and other stakeholders. Compliance with biosecurity standards is part of growing our industry and our economy,” said Ntshabele.

