South Africa: Citrogold launches new mandarin hybrid

South African variety development and management company Citrogold is commercializing a new mandarin hybrid cultivar called the Leanri, with the hectareage already fully subscribed until 2020.

The variety is being launched by Biogold International in other parts of the world. Both companies are part of the ANB Group, that is also known for the ClemenGold mandarin brand.

Leanri is an induced mutation of the Furr cultivar – a Clementine and Murcott hybrid – and is said to have a ‘rich flavour, deep orange external and internal colour, a low seed content and easy peeling attributes’.

“Its ripening period is from the middle of May to the end of June in the northern areas of South Africa which places it in the mid ripening slot, starting at the latter end of the Nova and Clementine picking period and ending shortly after the commencement of Nadorcott harvesting,” Citrogold product development manager Frederik Veldman said.

“No other exceptional cultivar currently fills this slot.”

He added the market increasingly expressed a preference for mandarins, but there was a ‘limited supply of great mandarin hybrids’.

“The Furr mandarin offers one of the best eating experiences and the challenge was to breed a seedless/low seeded, smooth skinned and smaller fruited version of the variety,” he said.

One of the surprising results of the mutation was that the Leanri ripened nearly four weeks earlier than the Furr, which is a rare consequence of this type of breeding, according to a release.

Following the recent harvest from experimental plantings in South Africa’s Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, a thorough technical report has been drafted confirming the viability of the cultivar.

Leanri fruit was evaluated for suitability to cold sterilisation (-0.6°C) and cold storage (2°C and 4°C) temperatures for 30 days. The fruit was also evaluated for internal and external quality before cold storage, and again seven days after removal from cold storage.

The fruit was reported to performed well at all temperature regimes with no external chilling injury, and minimal rind pitting or staining, while the internal quality remained good.

Citrogold said it was seeking to balance the interests of breeders and of farmers who are willing to take the risks involved with planting new cultivars.

“We realise that planting a new cultivar is a long-term investment and involves a certain amount of risk. Therefore we encourage growers to invest the required time, effort and costs to obtain the necessary information about new cultivars such as the Leanri,” Citrogold general manager Bryan Offer said.

“Citrogold has limited the hectarage of the first commercial plantings of Leanri in the Southern Hemisphere, thereby providing growers who are prepared to take risks with a new variety, with an assurance that markets will not be oversupplied in the early years of the its commercial development.

“This limit has already been fully subscribed in South Africa (2,200 hectares) and any further allocations will only be made in 2020 and will depend on the market response to the variety.”

During the last 15 years Citrogold has licensed over 10,000 hectares of plantings of new cultivars in South Africa.

Citrogold’s current product range includes oranges, lemons, mandarins, grapefruit, pomegranate, mangoes, macadamia and passiflora.