€7.2 million investment at new Coega Industrial Development Zone

South Africa: New cold storage facilities for citrus & pomefruit

On 1 June 2017 the first of three new cold rooms constructed by PE Cold Storage for the citrus and pomefruit industries will open at the Coega Industrial Development Zone, situated at the newest of Port Elizabeth's two harbours. The other two are expected to come into production four to six weeks thereafter. Each cold room provides 2,500 pallets.

"The expansion of the new facility amounts to a further investment of R100 million [€7.2 million], which will result in the doubling of the existing capacity of 7,500 pallets to around 15,000 pallets storage," says Mark Jensen, director of PE Cold Storage.

FPT Group (previously known as Fresh Produce Terminals) last year decided to convert its citrus storage facilities at the original Port Elizabeth harbour to a manganese terminal because the mineral means year-round business, compared to business only during the citrus season lasting five months.

"The cold store could no longer be operated profitably due to the decline in citrus volumes handled at the facility and pressure on rates due to increased capacity being available in the port of Ngqura [a new deep-water port situated halfway between Cape Town and Durban] and at inland cold stores," says Nicci van Niekerk, customer relations manager for the FPT Group. "The FPT Group will continue to offer direct shipping services to load specialised reefer vessels in the Port of Port Elizabeth."

This would have resulted in a shortage of pre-cooling facilities for Eastern Cape fresh produce, particularly citrus, leaving the harbour for export markets. PE Cold Storage stepped in and accelerated their cold storage warehouse expansion plans at Coega (originally to have been ready in 2020/21) in order to have new cold storage ready at the start of the 2017 citrus season.

Expanded cold storage capacity has also been necessitated by a growth projection of 25% in citrus volumes over the coming years, due to increased plantings coming into production, Jensen explains. The facility will additionally accommodate the pomefruit industry during summer, with apples and pears from the Langkloof pre-cooled for export starting in February.

Capacity will be such that when the citrus and pomefruit seasons overlap, both operations can run concurrently.

"Our operations involve the pre-cooling of fruit for our customers that export internationally to Europe, Russia, Middle East, India, UK, Canada and South East Asia to mention a few," Jensen adds. Pre-cooling rooms are also used for the sterilisation of fresh produce.

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