

Gabrie van Eeden, Goede Hoop Citrus

Western Cape's largest citrus packhouse encourages expansion in new varieties

Goede Hoop Citrus grew out of the original Citrusdal citrus cooperative founded in 1926. Today it is one of the biggest citrus packhouses in South Africa, functioning in a sorting, packing and marketing capacity for more than 50 citrus growers.

With annual volumes between 75 000 to 85 000t, it is the biggest citrus packhouse in the Western Cape. It also provides a free extension service to their growers. The company is affiliated to entities like APL Cartons (packaging material), Cape Fruit Coolers, Citrus Juices Pty Ltd and Goede Hoop Fruit Marketing.

Its first packing of the season, satsumas destined for the EU, started last week. There are three packhouses in Citrusdal, together handling about 2 900 x 400kg crates daily during peak season, with further volumes packed at an affiliated packhouse, Citrio, in nearby Eendekuil.

The company's growers supply the traditional varieties of satsuma, clementines, mandarins like the Fairchild mid-season and the Mor and Orri late mandarins, various navel types, Valencia, Minneola and lemons. As part of a project called BIG ("Belegging in Groei": Investment in Growth), Goede Hoop Citrus is encouraging its growers to expand to new cultivars, like the M7 navel, Nadorcott and Mandalate.

Their growers are also planting a brand new variety that has elicited much interest, the Leanri mandarin that is commercialised by Citrogold in South Africa and has been limited to 2,200ha in the Southern Hemisphere, until 2020. It ripens from the middle of June until mid-July in the Western Cape (about four weeks later than in the northern regions).

It is expected that this initiative of an additional 800ha will start bearing fruit within the next two to four years.



"Roughly 70 per cent of our volume is exported," says managing director, also responsible for marketing, Gabriele van Eeden. "We sell to the USA, Europe, the Middle East, Russia and more recently China. We continue to work on the Indian market. Our main competition comes from Australia for the lucrative American market."

The United States is a growing market for soft citrus and navels, the latter making up 80% of South African citrus exports to that market. American exports start in week 16 with satsumas. Usually only MidKnights go to the Chinese market.



"We are also continuously pursuing new markets," continues Van Eeden. "We have a healthy balance sheet and have to first make sure of our own efficiencies and effectiveness. We must distinguish ourselves further from other South African suppliers."

The company makes extensive use of automation in its packing houses, for instance optic sizers and grading machines that reduce human error and thereby ensure an optimal level of consistency according to the specifications of the particular buyer. Every packhouse has an engineer and team of technicians to maintain equipment. The company was one of the pioneers of degreening treatment (it has the capacity to degreen 16 000 crates) and the first to use autopackers.



Through the Goede Hoop Citrus Empowerment Trust, 17.1% of the company belongs to the workers who are now shareholders in their individual capacity. Dividends have been paid out to Goede Hoop Citrus shareholders for the past eight years. Initially this was limited to longterm employees but the innovative step was taken in 2015 to extend the ownership offer to seasonal workers who have worked continuously for 15 years or longer at the company.

Goede Hoop Citrus feels a particular responsibility towards its workforce and the community, given its long history in Citrusdal. It draws its 980 seasonal workers only from within the district and makes no use of labour brokers (labour brokering is a very controversial practice in South Africa). It has a permanent workforce of 96.

Van Eeden: "Goede Hoop Citrus believes its success lies in its passion for two things – products and people."

For more information:
 Gabriele van Eeden
Goede Hoop Citrus
 Tel: +27 22 921 8100
 Email: gve@ghcitrus.com
 www.ghcitrus.com



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