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Citrus industry targets Africa for growth

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The citrus industry has identified Africa as a region of significant export potential and plans are in place to develop a public private strategy to expand fruit trade into the region.

“As the southern African citrus volumes grow it makes a lot of sense to explore ways of expanding citrus exports into Africa,” says Citrus Growers’ Association CEO Justin Chadwick.

“The apple industry has played a pioneering role and has learnt through trial and error, and hard work, how best to supply these markets – and the citrus industry can learn from this and build on these experiences,” says Chadwick.

According to the CGA, exports of citrus from South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe into the African continent are extremely low. In 2014, 766 000 cartons were exported into the region. By 2016 this had doubled to 1.5 million cartons, but this represents only 1% of total exports.

The apple industry, on the other hand, exported 28% of the 2016 crop to Africa. “The leading destination is Nigeria which imports 34% of African volumes – although this

has decreased of late as falling oil prices batter the economy. Second largest by volume is Kenya – as the gateway into Eastern Africa (accounting for 15%), followed by Senegal at 10%, Togo (9%) and then a number of countries between 4 and 5% (Ghana, Cameroon, Angola and Ivory Coast)."

In terms of citrus, in 2014 and 2015 the main importers were Angola (20%), Gabon (16%), Kenya (27%) and Senegal (20%) and in 2016 Mauritius (27%), Reunion (14%), Togo (11%) and Kenya (10%).

Exporting to Africa is not without its challenges – expensive and inefficient ports, poorly developed cold chain infrastructure and intermittent power supply - as well as a shortage of foreign currency and lack of credit guarantees to mention a few.

"But the fact that 120 000 tons of apples move from South Africa to these markets means that it is possible," says Chadwick.

The Trade Work Group (TWG) of the Fruit Industry Value Chain Round Table (FIVCRT) met recently to develop a strategy to expand fruit trade into Africa.

The fruit industry was well represented, as was government, in recognition of the importance of understanding the developmental and political aspects of targeted African countries – not just the trade aspects.

Based on information shared, West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast), East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) and southern Africa were identified as the most promising markets.

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