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Clever technology secures South Africa's citrus exports

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Dewald Kirsten, the founder of Lucentlands Media. Source: Lucentlands

Unlike obsolete jobs like linotype setter, leech collector and milkman, the professional photographer may be down, but is not out.

Just ask Dewald Kirsten, founder of agricultural media producer, Lucentlands.

Hobbyist Kirsten turned pro in 2010 when those making a living through the lens already started feeling the pinch of diminished returns because of 'selfie' snapping and the general ascendancy of cellphone camera tech.

In 2017 he branched out into videography and today, confirms Justin Chadwick of the Citrus Growers' Association, Lucentlands ensures that South Africa adheres to Chinese standards for one of the country's strongest perishable export products.

"Chinese inspections of pack houses and orchards have taken an interesting turn in 2021 and 2022. With Covid making travel difficult, the Chinese have turned to live stream inspections," said Chadwick.

It worked by the local industry employing the services of a suitably qualified company, in this case Lucentlands, to assist in the process, he explained.

“While Chinese inspectors sit in Beijing, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) officials accompany representatives from the packhouse/farm as they walk through a virtual inspection. Accompanying the film crew is a suitably qualified interpreter who assists in asking the questions and translating the responses back to the inspectors in China.”

Anything, of course, can happen, causing disruption to a process that essentially should be disruption proof. Technology, oddly enough, has that paradoxical ability to let you down when you least expect it – like relying on GPS co-ordinates in a satellite blind spot when it's pitch dark and you haven't the foggiest where you are.

But Kirsten and his sidekick, Louise Brodie, did the hard yards in 2021, a year for disruption if ever there was one. So connectivity downtime and other snags and snafus were sorted to secure a seamless process this year, Chadwick said.

“They prepare thoroughly beforehand to make sure that the process is completed without issues. Although this is an expensive exercise, it has to be done, otherwise the list of DALRRD-approved orchards will not be signed off by the Chinese.”

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