

South Africa's fruit industry ready to work with new government leaders after 29 May elections

As South Africa heads to the polls tomorrow, 29 May, 2024, to vote in what is referred to as the most important general elections for the country, the fruit export industry is "ready to work with anyone in the new government." Fruit South Africa as well as the country's big citrus export industry says, they cannot go it alone and need the government to retain and expand market access.



(Right) Fhumulani Ratshitanga, CEO of Fruit South Africa with board member Derek Donkin, CEO of the South African Subtropical Growers' Association (Subtrop).

According to Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern African (CGA), they hope the current Minister of Agriculture, Thoko Didiza, would be retained in the position. It is her second stint in the position. She is therefore

well versed with the crucial role the fresh produce sector plays in South Africa.

"We would really welcome Minister Didiza to remain if that happens. She's always been a great supporter for us and industry."

The fresh produce sector in South Africa is a R63 billion export-oriented industry. The nearly 325 000 direct jobs provided by the fresh fruit industry is a crucial source of income for these people in many rural areas across the country who rely on their incomes created by the farming of citrus, table grapes, top and stone fruit, subtropical fruit and berries. The multiplier effect of the additional jobs created by the service and input providers, like packaging (cartons etc.), fertilisers and other services right through to ports and logistics provides a bigger sense of the importance of the fresh produce sector beyond what is often realised. Not to mention aspects like continuous training, on farm housing and a range of benefits make working in the fresh produce sector much more secure than jobs provided in the cities.

Fhumulani Ratshitanga, CEO of Fruit South Africa: "The R63 billion export-oriented fresh fruit industry of South Africa relies heavily on specific services by the South African Government. It's only through well-negotiated, favourable trade agreements and other market access requirements initiated by government, that the industry can successfully penetrate export markets around the world, while competing successfully. Therefore, the role of government greatly impacts the ability of the industry to navigate the competitive international fresh produce terrain, and to – consequently – contribute meaningfully to the national agenda."



Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern African (CGA).

Chadwick says while it would be good to continue working with Minister Didiza for continuity, they are willing to work with anyone that is appointed shortly after the elections. "If there's a change effected, we will work with whoever is in that position. The industry has got so much to offer, we would need to sit down and go through all the growth opportunities and then Vision 260 as we are looking at a 100 million cartons increase. For that to happen and to earn an additional R20 billion in Forex, and increase employment by 100 000 people, the Department of Agriculture has a massive role to play. We have to secure markets, retain markets where the EU is important, while we have to optimise and gain other markets. The markets are pretty well supplied. We have to improve our entry conditions and grow our market share. We need the Department to walk alongside and ahead of us, we will work with whoever is in office."

Ratshitanga confirms this position of South Africa's fruit industry and willingness to continue working with the new government that will follow. A sustainable industry success hinges heavily on focussed collaboration. "The industry remains hopeful that agriculture will continue to be prioritised, given its role in job creation, economic growth, and sustaining the viability of the rural communities in South Africa," concludes Ratshitanga.

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