

# South African SummerStar Ruby grapefruit promotes sustainable production while expanding European market presence

By [Carl Collen](#) | 19 August 2025

**South African growers are showcasing water-smart irrigation, precision agriculture, ethical labour practices and community investment as key sustainability features of their new grapefruit variety**



SummerStar Ruby, [the new South African grapefruit variety sold across Europe this summer](#), is being championed not just for its flavour, but also its sustainable nature.

A coalition of South African citrus growers joined forces to promote the Star Ruby variety in European markets as they look to reinvent the fruit's image and drive new growth in the category.

This led to the creation of a new brand – SummerStar Ruby – and a unified message designed to elevate the commodity, shift consumer perceptions and ultimately increase demand across Europe.

According to Barry Landman, chairman of the Grapefruit Variety Focus Group (part of the Citrus Growers' Association), SummerStar Ruby is "more than just delicious, it's grown with sustainability and ethical farming at its core".

"As today's consumers increasingly seek products that meet high environmental and social standards, SummerStar Ruby stands out as a responsible choice," he said.

So, what are the growers doing to ensure that what consumers find on supermarket shelves meets these expectations?

Landman highlighted a number of areas that growers are focusing on, starting with smart water use and adapting to a changing climate.

"SummerStar Ruby growers use a range of water-saving methods, including Regulated Deficit Irrigation, low-flow drip irrigation, and other smart irrigation systems, such as soil moisture sensors and weather-based irrigation scheduling," he outlined.

"Thanks to South Africa's summer rainfall, the fruit requires on average about 45 per cent less water than other citrus products.

"The variety is also well-suited to the country's semi-arid climate," he noted. "They have a strong tolerance to heat stress and saline irrigation, which also makes them adaptable to changing climate conditions.

Growers are also utilising precision agriculture innovations for lower impact.

"In addition to smart irrigation practices, the growers are embracing other advanced technologies to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact," Landman continued.

"Drone technology is widely used for aerial monitoring, helping growers assess canopy health, detect pest infestations early, and identify areas of stress across large orchards.

"GPS-guided equipment ensures fertilisers and crop protection products are applied accurately, minimising overlap and environmental impact," he outlined.

Many farms also use farm management software that consolidates data from weather stations, field sensors, and satellite imagery, helping growers make informed decisions about planting,

harvesting, and resource allocation.

Together, these tools form a data-driven ecosystem that supports sustainable and high-performance grapefruit production.

Healthier growing practices are being utilised, with Landman noting that healthy soils are key to healthy fruit.

"SummerStar Ruby growers use cover cropping and organic mulching to improve soil structure, capture carbon, prevent erosion, and stimulate additional biological activity," he confirmed.

"They also widely implement Integrated Pest Management – using natural predators and biological pest control over chemicals wherever possible."

In terms of certification, Landman said consumers can be confident that SummerStar Ruby Grapefruits are cultivated under strict sustainability standards.

"Many growers hold certifications such as GlobalGAP, Siza and Rainforest Alliance, which ensure responsible farming practices that focus on soil health, biodiversity conservation, water quality and responsible pesticide use."

Given South Africa's history, another key area for producers is ethical labour, which is "taken seriously", Landman pointed out.

To help manage this, the local fruit industry developed the Sustainability Initiative of South Africa (Siza), a third-party audit system based on national labour laws and additional retailer requirements.

The framework ensures fair wages, safe working conditions, freedom of association and zero tolerance for bonded or child labour.

Worker welfare programmes further support economic transformation and skills development, while independent and transparent grievance mechanisms provide fair processes for dispute resolution.

Finally, Landman said, growers are investing in long-term development initiatives that support the communities around their farms.

This includes funding for local schools, providing scholarships for children of farm workers, and partnering with NGOs on early childhood development initiatives.

**EUROFRUIT** is also prioritised, with farm communities receiving regular access to mobile clinics and wellness campaigns,” he commented.

”The growers also support housing improvements and transport services for seasonal workers, which helps to ensure dignity and safety beyond the workplace.”

Community nutrition programmes, youth sport sponsorships, and skills development workshops further demonstrate the growers’ dedication to holistic well-being.

”SummerStar Ruby Grapefruit is therefore a sustainably grown, ethically produced, and climate-smart fruit,” Landman added.

”European consumers can enjoy its sweet, tangy flavour this summer – knowing it has been produced with care for people and the planet.”

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