End of an era for South African citrus leader Justin Chadwick

By Fred Meintjes | 31 March 2025

Justin Chadwick, who is retiring as chief executive of the South African Citrus Growers' Association, speaks exclusively to Fruitnet about three decades of service

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Justin Chadwick, the long-serving chief executive of the Citrus Growers Association (CGA), is retiring.

Looking back at his time in the industry, he says the South African citrus business has learned many lessons in the past quarter century.

“The industry’s story the past 25 years is one of growth, resilience and adaptability,” he outlines. “It has made us stronger. I would describe the industry as a community, and a supportive one at that.”

Chadwick spoke exclusively to Fruitnet at the end of a career that saw him filling leading roles in the global and South African citrus business, as well as across the country's wider fresh produce industry.

"Citrus has become the economic heart of so many rural communities. It supports 140,000 livelihoods on rural level," he reflects. "I would describe the citrus industry as strong but held back from greater growth by significant challenges. Most of these challenges we can't solve as an industry by ourselves. All role-players and stakeholders must come together to do so."

The unity forged within the Southern African citrus industry has been one of the most significant achievements, he continued. "When I joined CGA 25 years ago there were fault lines throughout the country with different factions peddling different narratives and priorities – with little cognisance of the greater good," Chadwick remembers. "Without doubt the Southern African citrus industry is now united behind a common vision and common objectives."

Working with growers remains one of the extremely satisfying parts of the business, he confirms. "They are the most 'can do' people in the world and survive – and even thrive – through extremely adverse times. They are the most hospitable people I have ever met. They are more than members or business acquaintances – they are friends."

The formation of the World Citrus Organisation (WCO), and co-chairing it with Spanish partners from Ailimpo, was also a satisfying moment.

"This has brought all responsible citrus industries around the world together to ensure that the global citrus family continues to attract consumers to consume tasty, nutritious, healthy and safe citrus fruit," Chadwick enthuses. "There is more that binds us together than keeps us apart – fortunately most global players recognise the value of this goal of the WCO."

Ongoing industry expansion, achieved despite extreme odds, has also been rewarding, with Chadwick commenting that it is satisfying to know the CGA has been instrumental in creating an enabling environment for such growth to occur.

However, he is quick to remind CGA members that there are still major challenges to face.

"We are still concerned about port logistics," says Chadwick. "The only way to improve our container terminal efficiency in the longer term is with greater urgency regarding private public partnerships. More and more fruit will be coming off the trees, and the ports must be able to handle this increase, otherwise a massive opportunity for job creation and economic growth will be missed."

A further challenge is solving what he calls the European Union's "unscientific and unnecessarily trade restrictive measures" on citrus black spot and false codling moth, which he says remain "an enormous obstacle to growth."

These measures on imports from South Africa are being challenged by the South African government at the World Trade Organisation in two historic trade dispute cases.

"Should a satisfactory outcome be reached at the WTO, it will stimulate citrus export trade significantly," he explains.

Looking ahead to the future, Chadwick confirms that he wants to stay involved in the citrus industry. "My blood is orange. I am weighing up different options and will advise as soon as these are finalised."