



Dr Wilma du Plooy is the post harvest disease research and programme coordinator at the CRI.

The postharvest research capacity was fostered even more determinedly in the 1970s, with the likes of Chris Kellerman and Anton Hough. The eventual development of strong plant pathology centres at several South African Universities meant that highly qualified researchers could be pursued closer to home.

"The ground-breaking work of these research pioneers was followed by numerous other Southern African 'shining stars' in the global citrus research and technology transfer world, rendering Southern African experts highly sought after 'fair game' in competitive and commercial industries," Nel said.

Citrus Improvement Scheme

The industry's cultivar improvement scheme, which forms part of technical services, according to Von Broembsen, also resulted in South Africa being able to produce high volumes of good quality fruit.

The Citrus Improvement Scheme was launched in the mid-1980's, and its functions and those of Citrus Foundation block were taken over by the CRI after deregulation. "The scheme resulted in citrus growers using high quality planting material, which along with improved nursery tree quality, good production practices and new technologies, has resulted in the average yield of exportable citrus, across all the South African citrus varieties, increasing from between 20 tons/ha and 30 tons/ha to between 40 tons/ha and 50 tons/ha over the last two or so decades," Von Broembsen said.

The industry however not only benefits growers, it has over time become an important generator of gross domestic product and forms the backbone of many rural communities in the country. The industry employs over 125 000 people and contribute to around R1,6 billion in wages and salaries per year. It is also estimated that the industry can create one permanent employment opportunity for every R400 000 investment.



Where to now?

The Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) has this year celebrated its twentieth anniversary. Justin Chadwick, CEO of the CGA, said that association was put on the right course during the formative years with the help of some "extremely patient growers and mature team members."

This is reflected in the first issues that were identified during those first meetings, according to Justin, which included the development of emerging growers, granting of bursaries, the Citrus Journal, nursery tree certification, accreditation and shoot tip granting, tree census, citrus industry research, market development, market access and market coordination, as well as quality standards, local market issues and the affiliation to organised agriculture.

Justin said the initial goal of the CGA was to preserve the research capacity in the citrus industry, so as to ensure continued market access: "The CGA never got involved in the marketing, as the free market took care of that. It got involved where there was no other service provider – for example, for research and information, or where it made sense for collective growers to do things together."

Additional functions were added over the years, as growers identified a need, and added resources to CGA to be able to address that need. Examples are transformation, industry information and industry representation. "Transformation is essential to be a relevant industry in a changing South African context – especially with regard to black grower development and human skills development. The industry has various programmes aimed at empowering workers and emerging farmers," Justin said.

Relevant industry information was important, because it assisted growers in making informed decisions. He added that the citrus industry was the leading industry in terms of agricultural jobs and export earnings: "It is important that the citrus voice is heard in all spheres of government and society. Good communication with grower members and other stakeholders ensures that the industry message is always heard, and that issues are collectively addressed."

Justin sees growth in volumes of citrus exported; the number of students who have studied with Citrus Academy bursaries; gaining retaining and optimisation of market access; united grower fraternity; good communication systems and the fact that the CGA is recognised as representing the citrus industry as some of the main accomplishments of the association over the past twenty years.

He identified research capacity, unity, systems for phytosanitary controls, logistics and information as the industry's main strengths. In contrast he identified the misalignment of certain government department activities and strategies with those of industry and increased technical barriers to trade as the the greatest challenges.

The outlook for the industry is good, with Chadwick foreseeing the association becoming more involved in stimulating demand in markets, black growers becoming more competitive and sustainable and government and the industry becoming better aligned over the next five years.