



Update on e-Certification project and electronic data standards for South African export fruit

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E-Certification project: Report covering May to end-July 2018

Readers will be aware of the signing of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in March 2018 that will see Fruit South Africa (FSA) build online capabilities for DAFF to issue electronic certificates as a replacement for the paper phytosanitary certificates currently in use. This project is now well underway.

It is expected that by September 2018 the first electronic phytosanitary documentation will be processed by the Netherlands. This might sound promising but in reality it only represents the final step in the official export process and much work remains over the next 18 months to improve the official systems leading up to (prior to) the point of export. In particular the focus needs to be on how to "take out the paper" (or "de-materialize") the supply chain, and how systems can be developed to do automatic validation of the data. Together these two key factors will have the biggest impact on the efficiency of DAFF and stakeholders in the supply chain. Since May 2018 the following activities and milestones have been undertaken:

- **E-Certification office:** FSA have set up dedicated space for the

development, operation and support for the e-Certification platform in Hillcrest near Durban. Note the support contact number has also changed (now 031 940 6795) for both PhytClean and e-Certification queries.

- **FSA project team:** New expertise have been employed by FSA. Most of new team joined in June and some in July. These resources are in addition to the small group that was operating the PhytClean platform and means great software development capacity and project administration skills to support the project.

- **High-level stakeholder engagement:** During May and June Paul Hardman was able to attend various fruit industry associations to talk to them about the project and confirm the principles of how it should function. Visits were made to the avocado, pome and stone (Executive), table grape (SATI), and exporters (FPEF) Boards. Similar visits to the PPECB and CGA Boards will follow in the 3rd quarter of the year.

- **Visit by Dutch and Kenyan e-Certification experts to SA:** In June, two experts working on the Kenyan e-Certification platform (under KEPHIS), and a Dutch representative leading the Dutch e-Certification project, joined SA counterparts over four days to unpack what

Fruit South Africa eCert team met with the Kenyan and Netherlands team for a workshop in Pretoria on 19 June 2018.

A follow up workshop is planned for stakeholders in the Western Cape on the 29th August 2018.

e-Certification best-practice might look like. Exposure to these two existing systems in operation and how they had been put together was extremely valuable and made an immediate impact on the design of the South African solution. These colleagues are indeed thanked for their time, effort and support and we hope to be able to return the goodwill shown to us soon. The Dutch and Kenyan colleagues have also been very helpful subsequently by answering many queries via email and telephone.

- **Strategic Project Management Committee (SPMC):** DAFF have formed the SPMC as a Committee providing high-level support within DAFF and to provide general project oversight.

- **Technical Project Management Committee (TPMC):** The TPMC was also formed in June by DAFF and is intended to provide guidance to the FSA team at an operation and technical level. The TPMC is expected to meet every 4-6 weeks (roughly in line with software development cycles).

- **Industry stakeholder engagement:** The e-Certification team has also set up e-Certification Best Practice Workshops as opportunities to raise awareness about the project and elicit inputs and recommendations from key stakeholders. Workshops have been held in Durban (19th June, 31st July) and Stellenbosch (18th July) so far, with the same concept to be rolled out in Gauteng (details to follow). These stakeholder workshops will run in each centre approximately monthly to keep stakeholders in those regions abreast of project progress.

Looking ahead over the next few months the team will be focusing on:

- **Visit to the Netherlands:** DAFF and the Netherlands government have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to cooperate on e-Certification. As part of this MOU Dutch counterparts will host the South African delegation in September to work on the delivery processes of export certificates. It is planned that live demonstrations of the system might be possible during the meetings.

- **On-going stakeholder engagement:** Routine meetings with industry stakeholders will continue.

- **System design:** A range of system design questions around the how to manage requests for phytosanitary documentation must be addressed such as:

- o How do clients make a request for Phytosanitary certificate?
- o Where are such requests made?
- o Who can make such requests?, and
- o What type of data would need to be included in the request?

These topics will be covered in the stakeholder engagement workshops.

- **Building on validation concepts:** Much work is also needed to create appropriate reference points so clients will be able to standardize the data when making requests for electronic export documentation. These reference points will also provide the basis for automation of data validation. In other words, systems will be able to automatically check that the correct data has been submitted and in the correct format. Validation also means calling for other data (e.g. PhytClean data) to determine whether in fact that fruit actually qualifies to go to that intended market. Data validation will therefore depend on the progress made by ESAFI, discussed now below.

Electronic Standards Authority for the Fruit Industry (ESAFI)

ESAFI was set up in 2016 with the specific purpose of developing and publishing electronic standards to support the communication of information between stakeholders in the supply chain and officials (DAFF), with the view to move toward electronic certification. The intention is not to replace any legislation or rules, but rather drive a process to have consistent interpretation of those rules that are accessible to all stakeholders.

Now that electronic certification is becoming a reality the significance of ESAFI has grown tremendously and an urgent need has arisen to move from the limited list of ESAFI standards already in place (mainly around Food Business Operator definitions, orchard definitions, cultivars and marketing indications, etc.) to Standards for phytosanitary purposes like additional declarations, treatments etc. The current list of standards can be found at: www.phytclean.co.za/esafi/

Thus after a hiatus (the last meeting took place in 2017) ESAFI was re-launched in July 2018. ESAFI will now continue to meet on a regular basis to work on the Standards to be used in the e-Certification process. Interested parties should watch for developments on the ESAFI website or make contact with the e-Certification team.

Conclusion

After many years of waiting for electronic data exchange between the commercial and official system the creation of the e-Certification project by DAFF means the fruit industry is now moving rapidly to a situation where e-Certification will be reality, and probably the norm. There is still a tremendous amount of work to be done before large scale uptake of the IT solutions under development, but overall the project is on track and expectations are that in 2019 some exporters will be able to start requesting for e-Certificates directly from their own IT systems.