

Sustainable water resource management

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The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) directors identified water as the single most important environmental issue in contemplating matters contained within the CGA Consumer Assurance portfolio. Beyond the devastating drought, this high prioritisation of water-related topics can best be explained through a broader understanding of the strategic importance and absolute dependence on accessible, quality freshwater for the sustainability of livelihoods and citrus businesses.

Retailers have also rejuvenated their interest in water use and stewardship. For instance, some buyers are requiring more water-use monitoring and reporting to retain access to their shelves. This retailer pressure is in response to wider social and political trends where the consumer/voter is now more concerned about the impact of food systems on the environment. This pressure cannot be ignored, and is only likely to intensify.

So what can be done?

The CGA has been looking into how to approach water related issues. This includes finding ways to interact with growers and stakeholders about their main water concerns, and how the CGA can best support growers facing these challenges. One quickly sees that the problems are complex and multi-dimensional, often involving numerous stakeholders. They're also unique to particular circumstances, and potential solutions vary considerably across cases. Even when the problems are clear-cut, limited resources or higher funding priorities are obstacles that must still be overcome. Ultimately it is the citrus growers themselves who have a key role to play in managing the water issues in their situation, both on the farm and at the catchment level. However, it is the CGA's intent to support these growers with strategic information to guide thinking and present options, and to create a platform for the exchange of ideas to help them work through possible remedies to address water-related matters.

CGA sustainable water resource management bulletins

The main CGA initiative right now is to raise awareness and to introduce key topics for discussion relating to water. The intent is

to provide a path for them to follow individually, whilst collectively exploring ways of effectively managing water on and off farms.

To provide this material the CGA has contracted Blue North to create five bulletins that focus on key aspects of sustainable water resource management. The CGA will be distributing these bulletins to the citrus industry over the next few weeks. Within each bulletin, the goal has been to expand understanding of the topic by identifying "key risks" and then "good practice pathways".

It should be noted that this material is not intended to replace local expertise and service providers. In fact, the expectation is that with the provision of these bulletins a far more meaningful and impactful discussion can be engaged with these experts, thus increasing the value of their inputs.

Key water topics

The Sustainability Initiative of South Africa (SIZA) introduced their Environmental module in 2018, largely in response to the need to be able to monitor and communicate the steps being taken on farms around environmental matters. Developed with WWF SA, this environmental standard gives specific attention to key water themes. These CGA Bulletins help bridge the gap between the circumstances on the farm and what the retailer needs as evidence of good practice.

A linkage back to the SIZA Environmental Standard has also helped to create the framework for the bulletins, with the aim of assisting SIZA members to fulfil their SIZA obligation and to add value to that process.

Farmers are encouraged to take hold of this material, digest it and let it translate into real action on farms and in the catchments in which they operate. It is evident that most of the bulletin focus areas are "not urgent" but are really "important" – as highlighted by the CGA leadership (growers). Managers are therefore encouraged to use these slightly quieter summer months to tackle water resource management.

The ultimate goal is to see relevant changes happening for the good on farms and that businesses are becoming more sustainable.



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Next steps

- The CGA and Blue North to identify specific case studies featuring citrus farms practising the principles discussed in the bulletins
- Draw a link between theory and practice in a way that makes sense to citrus growers
- Readers to also share their own suggestions and examples.

The key water topics have been divided into the following bulletins:

- Reducing the negative impacts on water resources caused by farming activities
 - Optimisation of water use on farm
- The management of aquatic ecosystems and controlling invasive alien plants
 - Sustainable catchment management
- Guidance for the implementation of a water management system.

Copies of the bulletins are available electronically
(in PDF format) from Paul Hardman: ph@cga.co.za

SA fruit journal
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