

LAUNCH

of Citrus sustainability forum



Paul Hardman

On 24 February the Citrus Sustainability Forum (CSF) was launched during a virtual session. By Paul Hardman



The topics covered in the virtual session sparked lively participation by the growers and supply chain partners who had joined.

Background to CSF

The CGA Board met in November 2020 to consider strategic challenges and opportunities facing the citrus industry. From this process the CGA has adopted the CGA Food Safety and Sustainability Strategic Plan. This is a living document aimed at providing direction for CGA staff and the citrus industry around food safety and sustainability matters over the next four years. Within this context one clear need was identified: better communication and coordination within the citrus industry. Hence, the launch of the CSF to provide a vehicle to tackle these common problems and to identify workable solutions.

Functioning of the CSF

The CSF has no specific mandate, but plays an important role in congregating stakeholders for the sharing of ideas. Direction provided from the CSF will feed into the Consumer Assurance portfolio of the CGA. Participation in the Forum is made up of citrus growers, packhouses, exporters, industry researchers, upstream input suppliers, downstream service providers and regulatory bodies.

The CSF is expected to meet twice a year – most probably in a virtual format – or whenever an emergency necessitates a meeting. The next meeting is planned for August this year.

Focus of the CSF

At the first meeting, representatives from the main sectors provided their perspective on what the CSF should be doing. The speakers

included Christo Theron and Karline Grobler (growers and packhouses), Steve Turner (exporters), Prof Vaughan Hattingh (researchers) and Dr Ntshabele (regulators). From these talks and participants' input, the following issues stand out:

- 1 Tightening retailer requirements and how this is having a negative impact on the application of proper Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- 2 The loss of key active substances (authorisations or MRLs)
- 3 Backlog of PPP registrations at Act 36 of 1947
- 4 Environmental considerations (e.g. water, carbon emissions/energy, soil health, packaging, transportation and shipment, circular economy)
- 5 Cost and complexity of verification systems: food safety, environmental and social standards and audits.

While many of the above topics are not new, a renewed intensity is being felt by the producers as policies like the EU Green Deal and Farm-to-Fork strategies are being rolled out. The CGA is reacting accordingly and in line with the strategic plan, increasing capacity at the CGA office to drive this programme.

The CGA has also released a questionnaire to capture additional information on any issues from stakeholders. Stakeholders are encouraged to inform the CGA of relevant challenges, using the following email address: sustainability@cga.co.za

The CSF was launched to provide a vehicle to tackle strategic challenges, and to identify workable solutions.