

WORLD CITRUS ORGANISATION

Hosts Spanish field day



Paul Hardman

The Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) is a founding member of the World Citrus Organisation (WCO) – created for citrus producers around the world to work collectively on issues that impact the citrus sector, and to ultimately increase the consumption of citrus fruit. By Paul Hardman



As a relatively young organisation, the WCO facilitates opportunities for WCO members to come together and engage. The WCO technical visit – a field day – to Valencia in Spain on 3 October 2022 preceded the Fruit Attraction Madrid trade show that took place from 4 - 7 October.

The field day was not well communicated prior to the event, but those able to attend found it very useful. By far the most important information was exchanged during the travel between destinations (i.e. squashed into a hired vehicle). Countries represented were Peru, Argentina, Morocco and SA (Justin Chadwick and Paul Hardman), and of course, local Spanish growers.

Global citrus scene

The interaction confirmed that all citrus producing countries are going through tough times right now. Increased supply and logistics (high freight rates in particular) have certainly challenged producers in the southern hemisphere, as markets struggled to absorb higher prices to offset higher costs. Strategies on how to cope over the next few years will probably include

removing unproductive commodities and pursuing alternative products as "a way out of" financial pressures. Also, improving the exchange of supply data such as weekly volumes shipped from each country, can provide exporters with a sense of total supply to a market and in turn signal whether more or less fruit is required there. Sharing of historical information is something the CGA is already involved with, but more could be done to learn about volumes shipped from other countries.

Key northern hemisphere suppliers have struggled through a very dry and hot summer that has now significantly impacted on estimates for the coming season. Some figures suggest a decline of 35 - 50% on 2021 figures in certain regions. At the time of writing it wasn't clear how this would pan out over the northern hemisphere winter, but packing started in earnest in the middle of October for the early varieties.

Citrosol

The largest supplier of postharvest treatments in Spain, Citrosol, welcomed the group to their plant in Potries, about an hour's drive



south of Valencia. Citrosol products and technology (mostly monitoring and dosing machines to ensure the right quantity of treatments continues to be applied to the fruit) are all formulated and made here before shipment to clients globally. South Africa is a key focus area outside of Spain, along with Peru. Citrosol's presence in SA has been felt for a number of years, as they are very active in the highly-competitive postharvest crop protection space.

After a tour of the facilities, ideas were exchanged about current pressures facing packhouses. Most of the topics that emerged are those being addressed at the Citrus Sustainability Forum (CSF) in SA, including retailer requirements for lower residues, EU Farm-2-Fork Strategy targets to reduce pesticide use and the need to produce fruit more sustainably, as well as the impact of colder shipping regimes on fruit quality. Organic production is obviously receiving considerable attention in the EU, but the question remains: How are EU farmers going to achieve these goals? Consumers now expect more organic fruit, but seem unwilling to pay the higher prices – essentially creating a fork-to-farm pressure back down the supply chain.

Farm visit

The opportunity to go into citrus orchards just outside Valencia city was also welcomed and provided insight around what Spanish producers are dealing with. Although this

1: From left: Justin Chadwick, Anya Jaworski, Jorge Bretó, Benito Orihuel, Paul Hardman, Raul Perello, Abdelrhani Bouafi and Leonor Lazarte De La Tore 2: Leanri Orchard in Valencia, Spain 3: Mandarin Orchard in Valencia, Spain. Paul Hardman (left), Anya Jaworski from Argentina (centre), Justin Chadwick (second from the right) and Abdelrhani Bouafi (Morocco). They were accompanied by three Spanish citrus producers.



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time was limited, a few things stood out:

- Dry summer conditions have had a material impact on volume expectations for the coming harvest.
 - Only GLOBALG.A.P certification was required to supply EU markets.
 - Sustainability initiatives were limited to projects focused on water course management and biodiversity protection.
 - How the EU Green Deal will change future grower activities was not that apparent.
 - It was interesting to see Leandri, a mandarin-type cultivar developed in SA, planted and thriving in Spain.
 - Harvesting and packing are coordinated centrally, including the provision of large teams (300 - 400) to pick the fruit.
- There was little discussion about phytosanitary

requirements, which is in line with the WCO approach (i.e. to focus on issues of common interest rather than what might divide the citrus industries). This was emphasised again at the WCO meeting held later in the week.

Appreciation

The CGA would like to thank the WCO secretariat for arranging the field day to Valencia, which turned out to be extremely informative. Members of the CGA are encouraged to look out for future WCO events, and to use these opportunities to meet other producers and citrus value chain players from across the globe. Finding friends in the broader citrus industry might well lead to solving some of our current and future challenges. 