

COVID-19 CGA Response Committee

During March 2021 much thought was being given to the potential impact of a third COVID 19 wave, and when it was likely to hit. By Paul Hardman



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Very high citrus volumes were estimated for 2021 and all human and physical resources across the supply chain could be needed to get the fruit off the trees and into the markets. But would these resources actually be available throughout the season?

After establishing the CGA COVID Response Committee (CRC) in 2020, the CGA resumed with this sub-committee of the CGA Board in 2021 to track and mitigate the risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The only CRC change in 2021 was that representatives from DALRRD, the PPECB and the FPEF joined the meetings for a first-hand exchange of information. The CRC met regularly throughout the year to evaluate current COVID realities. The

risk register was duly updated and Table 1 reflects changing priorities around the different risk factors (on a relative scale 0 indicates low priority, whereas 100 indicates high priority).

COVID-19 and the 2021 citrus export season

As it turned out, the third COVID-19 wave coincided with the main citrus export months (June, July and August). Fortunately, much of the preparation and groundwork had been done during the previous year to mitigate the situation. For example, the fruit industry customised guidelines compiled by the Citrus Academy that were used to manage the situation when positive COVID-19 cases were detected in workplaces.

Also, clear lines of communication had already been established to ensure relevant parties remained informed of key developments. Positive cases were quickly reported so swift action could be taken to minimise exposure to other workers and parties. This was particularly relevant where DALRRD and PPECB inspectors had potentially been exposed, and regional managers needed to make suitable arrangements to keep other inspectors safe, but to also keep these official services going. This actually proved critical to ensure inspection services in orchards and packhouses continued in the first half of the export season. Of course, the COVID guidelines were adjusted and updated

Table 1 Reflecting the changing priorities around the different risk factors (on a relative scale 0 indicates low priority, whereas 100 indicates high priority).

Risk factors		CRC meeting dates							
		29-Apr	27-May	10-Jun	24-Jun	08-Jul	22-Jul	04-Aug	19-Aug
On farm	Farm worker +ve	42	42	54	54	54	54	60	60
	Farm availability inputs and services	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36
	Farm workers - interprovincial transport	63	36	36	36	36	36	18	18
Packhouse	Packhouse input and services	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
	Inspection services DALRRD PPECB	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
	Packhouse worker +ve	56	56	72	72	72	72	80	80
Transport	Farm packhouse transport workers	30	30	30	36	36	36	36	36
	Diesel shortage	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
	Transport criminal activities	30	30	30	30	30	48	36	42
	Transport border post	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Transport cost	49	49	49	49	49	63	63	63
	Transport congestion	72	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
Cold stores	Transport availability vehicles	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	80
	Cold store worker tested +ve	72	72	72	72	72	72	80	80
	Cold store space availability	70	70	70	70	70	70	90	90
Shipping	Inspections pre-clearance	45	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
	Shipping availability empty containers	90	50	50	50	50	80	80	80
	Delays in vessels discharging cargo	64	50	70	70	70	50	50	50
Ports	Break bulk vessels discharge - China	64	64	100	100	100	50	20	20
	Port worker tested +ve	42	48	48	54	54	54	54	54
	Port communication	90	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
Markets	Port efficiency	30	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	Markets closure wet market	42	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Market availability and price competing products	42	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Market volatility	49	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Markets general low demand	45	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
	Social media: association CVD19 and product	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
Documentation	Documentation SARS/BOL	70	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
	Documentation issuing phyto	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
	Documentation acceptance phytos	-	70	70	70	0	0	0	0

according to new government regulations that came into play, and when the lockdown levels applied throughout the country, they were adjusted accordingly.

Last year, the government roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines was a key focus area for the CRC. The vaccination programme got off to a slow start, with a limited amount of vaccines. However, once that constraint was overcome, it was pleasing to see CGA members stepping up to ensure farm workers had access to the vaccine. High-volume vaccination days were arranged on numerous farms.

The Orange Heart vaccination drive helped to get information to decision-makers and their efforts are much appreciated

The Orange Heart fruit drive was set up in 2020 to help communities that were particularly affected by COVID-19 and the related restrictions introduced to prevent its spread. Unfortunately, the volume of fruit donated in 2021 (49 tonnes) was less than in 2020, partly due to considerable



Citrus sponsored through the Orange Heart Fruit Drive

uncertainty and challenges with matching supply and requirements, not to mention logistics problems. The CGA hopes that this initiative will gain momentum in 2022, and thanks the growers who donated fruit despite these challenges.

Overall impact of COVID-19 on citrus exports

All in all, the adverse impact of COVID-19 on the performance of the citrus industry in 2021 was well contained. It was also against the backdrop of the pandemic that the industry faced the highly disruptive events in July (i.e. the KZN and Gauteng civil unrest and the Transnet cyber attack). And lockdown



restrictions made it particularly difficult to address these problems. Yet, having had to collectively tackle the COVID-19 pandemic as an industry, much of the institutional arrangements were now in place to ensure that industry stakeholders could weather the effects of these new challenges.

Furthermore, prevailing consequences triggered by pandemic-related problems on logistics chains continue to be reported. Worldwide, shipping has been gravely impacted and South African exporters have faced shortages of containers and in some cases, delays in access to ports to discharge fruit. These challenges are expected to persist into the new season.

Vote of thanks

The CGA would like to thank all stakeholders in the citrus industry for all their efforts to keep the citrus industry operational during these trying times last year. Without them, supply chains would have simply come to a halt. Finally, CGA would also like to thank the participants in the CRC for sacrificing their personal time to engage in these meetings. Your contribution is valued. 🍊

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Citrus Academy short courses

Citrus Academy short courses are aimed at providing a short, sharp insight into the essential components of the citrus production system. By Sive Silo

Citrus Production Short Course:



Learn about all aspects of citrus production including the history of the industry, the roles of industry organisations, citrus production practices and the citrus export value chain.

Citrus Packing Short Course:



Learn about citrus packhouse practices, including receiving, fruit treatments, sorting and packing, meeting market requirements, and maintaining traceability and food safety.

Citrus Export Supply Chain Short Course:



Learn about what happens to citrus export fruit after it leaves the packhouse until it arrives in the overseas market, including all about service providers, market requirements, special markets, inspections, documentation, and best practices.

Citrus Short Course Schedule

Dates	Workshop name	Location
February		
2-4 Feb '22	Citrus Production Short Course	Nelspruit
16-18 Feb '22	Citrus Production Short Course	Groblersdal
16-18 Feb '22	Citrus Packing Short Course	KZN
24-25 Feb '22	Citrus Export Supply Chain Course	Nelspruit
23-25 Feb '22	Citrus Packing Short Course	Zimbabwe
March		
2-4 Mar '22	Citrus Export Supply Chain Course	Cape Town
9-11 Mar '22	Citrus Packing Short Course	Letsitele
7-9 Mar '22	Citrus Production Short Course	Zimbabwe 1
10-12 March '22	Citrus Production Short Course	Zimbabwe 2
16-18 March '22	Citrus Packing Short Course	Hoedspruit
30 Mar – 1 Apr '22	Citrus Production Short Course	Citrusdal
April		
6-9 April '22	Citrus Export Supply Chain Short Course	Fort Beaufort
20-22 April '22	Citrus Export Supply Chain Short Course	Addo

For more information and to register online, visit www.citrusacademy.org.za
Email your queries to Nonhle at nonhle@citrusacademy.org.za