

CITRUS SUSTAINABILITY FORUM

A review of year one



Sustainability issues remain a dominant theme in the minds of producers, buyers and consumers, with a new significant dimension having come to the fore in the last nine months: economic sustainability. By Paul Hardman



One year on from the formation of the Citrus Sustainability Forum (CSF), we can reflect on its activities and progress and contemplate what lies ahead.

What is the purpose of the CSF?

The forum was established to bring supply chain partners together to raise, discuss and explore workable solutions for sustainability challenges. This objective is in line with the CGA Food Safety and Strategic Plan – a guiding document to focus the efforts of the CGA and industry, to tackle the most important sustainability needs. Addressing these needs supports the overall goal of the CGA of making the citrus growers more competitive in the long run.

Key to this process has been the need to get people together to create

communication channels, which has become vital during the pandemic where physical meetings have not been possible.

A solid start to the CSF

Four online CSF meetings have taken place since its launch in February 2021. Typically, about 130 participants join these meetings and various subject matter experts have contributed with targeted presentations.

The mix of participants is wide but one of the most important linkages is that between trade (commercial interests) and research (at CRI). This allows researchers to get first-hand information about pressures in the supply chains, and for the supply chain parties to be made aware of scientifically-proven realities. This is especially true in the case of crop protection where many possible solutions appear conceptually attractive, but very few show meaningful pest and disease control. It is these types of issues that the CSF has proactively addressed.

Key issues being addressed by the CSF

The CSF agenda is driven by citrus grower and packhouse needs, and a range of topics and issues have been tackled during the past year, including:

- **MRL updates:** tracking the status of active substances and MRLs in all markets.
- **MRL risk assessments:** looking into the future to see how MRLs might change, and undertaking impact assessments to see what this will mean for citrus industry stakeholders.
- **2021 Citrus Sustainability Survey:** This survey captured the industries perception on key sustainability topics and ranked factors that are threatening their sustainability. The survey results were reported in the SAFJ.
- **SHAFPE Sustainably Task Team:** SA is working with other southern hemisphere suppliers to address common sustainability challenges, and concerns about the certification requirements that may be demanded by the markets to demonstrate compliance. The task team is also looking into economic implications on trade due to the enormous increase in input costs observed in the last six months.
- **SIZA:** relevant developments at SIZA, including the launch of the data capturing services, were presented and discussed.
- **GlobalG.A.P:** updates to Version 6 and the transition to new editions of GlobalG.A.P.
- **Labelling requirements:** the changes to the EU rules for stickers and labels were covered comprehensively; this is a dynamic space where changes are coming into play for the 2022 citrus export season.
- **Alternative energy options:** exploring the barriers to the adoption of alternative energy sources; overcoming these is necessary to wean the fruit industries off power supply based on fossil fuels.
- **Confronting Climate Change:** developments at the CCC – in particular the integration of data systems with SIZA.

- **Cost of Compliance study:** CGA is working with other fruit industries to estimate the cost of currently used certification schemes. The direct and indirect costs of these programmes can be significant and are a heavy burden – especially for emerging and new growers. The final report is expected in the second quarter of the year.
- **Retailer engagement:** Buyers and retailers occasionally introduce specific “sustainability” requirements that may, in fact, not be appropriate in the South African context nor prove truly sustainable. The CSF allows stakeholders to raise these and for more practical solutions to be put forward, or to push back on the requirement altogether.

What does the future look like?

At this point in the season and looking ahead, a few topics seem prominent:

- **Crop protection:** The CGA anticipates significant changes in the crop protection space in the next few years. Already, agricultural chemical suppliers

F2F strategy take shape. Will the EU realistically be able to move towards 25% organic production and how does the Russia-Ukraine war, for example, impact that goal? Can EU growers adequately protect their crops if a reduction of 50% in crop protection use is expected? Spanish producers are already complaining.

- **Economic hardship:** The CSF will have to place more emphasis on how to help businesses find ways to ensure profitability and competitiveness. Though the CGA itself does not have a mandate to get involved in commercial matters, where issues impact the industry as a whole, it will highlight and engage on these topics through the CSF.

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are pulling back on their support of active substances where they believe these have no hope of meeting stricter regulatory requirements in some countries. This is particularly concerning with current needs for the control of key phytosanitary pests (e.g. CBS and FCM), and will be essential to protect the industry from future threats (e.g. HLB).

- **EU Farm-2-Fork (F2F) strategy:** The next 18 months are going to be particularly important in relation to how the ambitions laid out in the

What next for the CSF?

It has been pleasing to see the high level of participation by a range of stakeholders in the CSF since its inception, and this interest is expected to grow in 2022. The perceived increase in sustainability and food safety issues underscores a clear need for the CSF. More attention is going to be required on cost-cutting and economic sustainability matters, where possible. And now that COVID restrictions appear to be relaxing, it may be possible to finally have an in-person CSF meeting in 2022. 🍊