

Growers can help grow **FOOD SECURITY**

SA currently navigates unprecedented levels of unemployment, which perpetuates poverty.

When pondering food security, it is the availability of food that most often comes to mind. Yet for many, it is the ability to afford buying the food that is problematic. Despite this, we live in a world where opulence and waste stand shoulder to shoulder with hunger and despair.

As the biggest employer of labour in agriculture, the fruit industry plays a leading role in ensuring that hundreds of thousands of South Africans can feed themselves and their dependents. However, our growers – price takers – are under tremendous financial strain. During 2022 input costs increased to unsustainable levels, with growers cutting costs to the bone and often depleting their reserves just to maintain operations. Then there are rising labour costs, which – if they continue unabated – will eventually necessitate mechanisation, exacerbating unemployment. The Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) concluded that in the citrus industry, for example, four out of five growers operated at a loss in 2022, with no significant improvement foreseen for 2023.

A further BFAP study shows that citrus growers spend R3.7 billion annually on compliance with EU measures. These numbers resonate throughout the fruit industry, and cannot be sustained. They will only result in increased job losses and economic decline. It would bring notable relief to the citrus industry if Government successfully opposed the discriminatory, technically unjustified, and unnecessary EU import requirements for South African citrus. But despite their woes, growers

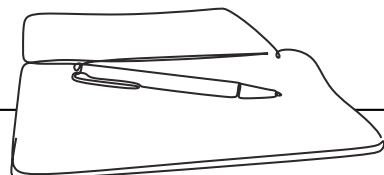


Justin Chadwick

throughout the fruit industry of SA have been known to donate within their communities, tonnes of fruit, along with other staples. This was sparked during COVID-19 lockdown and has only grown in numbers and value added.

The fruit industry of SA has the potential to significantly grow employment – and therefore, the local economy – given that many young orchards and vineyards are still to reach full maturity and peak production. And growers are acutely aware of the important role played by the people who help ensure the profitability of their enterprises – the employees. Maximising the economic potential that resides within the fruit industry, however, demands the ability to operate profitable farms, void of persistent impediments like port setbacks, rolling blackouts, and ever-shifting compliance goalposts in international markets.

Growers are in it for the long haul, and they understand their role in helping to maintain food security. Therefore, they are committed to working with Government and all stakeholders in the value chain, to continue to provide jobs that enable access to food. Isn't that what SA ultimately needs? 



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