

CRI ANNUAL POSTHARVEST Workshops 2024

The annual regional CRI Postharvest Workshops were held in January and February before the packing season commenced. By Rudolph Strydom and Natasha Jackson

The workshops were conducted in six different production regions where various pertinent topics were discussed. The event had excellent attendance, with more than 1 200 delegates attending. The high number of younger attendees is especially promising for the future of the Southern African citrus industry. This year the main sponsors were ICA and Citrashine, with Citrosol being the platinum sponsor.

SESSIONS

1 An overview by an area representative of specific industry challenges and prospects was followed by a main sponsor presenting an organisational snapshot. Then, an economic overview of 2023 and prospects for 2024 highlighted that expectations of a difficult 2023 season were offset by increased profit margins (compared to 2022) for most producers, as well as good prices for all citrus cultivars.

Other presentations included current market access requirements and export regulations, the CGA Vision 260 Logistics Outlook project to plan for a significant increase in citrus exports in the near future, consumer assurance, and a review of the carton accreditation system in the citrus industry.

2 This session focused on packhouse practices from intake quality management, packhouse delivery inspection, and critical factors to consider during wax application. An agricultural economist shared cost-saving techniques in a citrus packhouse, based on the results from a benchmark study. Attendees learnt that labour costs, packing material, and transport to port make up 80% of the total packing cost.

Other highlights include confirmation that shaded and well-ventilated intake areas impact fruit quality, physiology and disease development. Degreening accelerates the physiological ageing of the fruit. It should only be done on a completely dry fruit surface, when colour break has occurred. The importance of testing for and having the correct ORP, pH, and chlorine concentration in the tip bath for efficient water and fruit surface sanitation, was emphasised. The pros and cons of a wet or dry tip system were also discussed.

Stringently following postharvest fungicide application protocols will ensure effective decay control. And disease pressure can be reduced by avoiding wounding, managing chemicals, implementing proper orchard and packhouse sanitation, managing the cold chain, and limiting delays during packing and transport. Care and diligence in the packhouse will result in more profit, especially with chemical application and management. Methods on optimising the dry tunnels through regular maintenance and servicing were shared with attendees, to ensure efficient airflow and heating. Good management of the wax bed will ensure healthy, protected fruit with an acceptable shelf life, desirable aesthetics, and good returns in the market.

3 The third session covered topics on packaging, consignment preparation, cooling research, and critical information on rind disorder management. Updates were also given on the results obtained from research conducted on pallet stability, strength, different pre-cooling systems, and protocols.

Follow the CRI guidelines for packaging material and palletisation to ensure the use of quality cartons, as well as adequate pallet stacking and strapping.

Also under discussion were the symptoms, causes, and available prevention strategies for different common rind disorders, plus, consignment preparation and how to prevent consignment rejections.

4 The final session covered postharvest disease control and wastewater management. The importance of orchard and packhouse sanitation was emphasised and demonstrated through a case study of a struggling packhouse that, by improving its sanitation practices and making drastic overall changes, turned its situation around.

The importance of keeping retention samples was explained, and how they can be used to give feedback to different parties. This enables accurate identification of problems in the export chain, as well as determining if the postharvest chemical program is effective. The potential cause and control methods for emerging diseases were discussed. Certain postharvest diseases are often overshadowed by the more common, problem-causing diseases.

A practical and cost-effective solution for the management of sewage and effluent water was provided by a packhouse manager. The systems illustrated by this talk are environmentally friendly, readily expendable and easy to maintain.

Notwithstanding the excellent attendance and feedback that reflect the growing success of these regional postharvest workshops, CRI continues to strive to improve. The CRI team thanks all the sponsors for their valued contribution.



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