

The more things change, the more they stay the same



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(outgoing CGA CEO)

This is the last time that I have the pleasure of writing the foreword for the *South African Fruit Journal*. I want to thank Catherine for the opportunity, and for always keeping the Journal a good read.

After over 25 years at the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), I will be retiring at the end of March 2025. Although I look forward to doing more of the things I love to do, I will miss doing what I am called to do.

Looking back over 25 years, the saying "the more things change, the more they stay the same" comes to mind. The things that do not change are the enormous challenges and the enormous opportunities that the fresh fruit industry faces every year. Twenty-five years ago, there was very little on the fresh fruit industry agendas regarding logistics – the ports were working efficiently, road and rail infrastructure was functional, and the cold chain was intact.

Many will agree that the biggest challenges facing the fresh fruit industry now revolve around logistics. With state-owned entities hollowed out by corruption and mismanagement, it is an enormous challenge for the present leadership to bring about

the necessary changes that will cement SA's position as a reliable fresh fruit supplier. International receivers of our fruit need certainty, but the present logistics environment is largely uncertain. Beyond new equipment, our ports need world-class management and know-how to turn things around before it is too late. Robust public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been recognised by the South African government and the industry as the only way forward. But the time for merely talking about these PPPs is long gone; we need action.

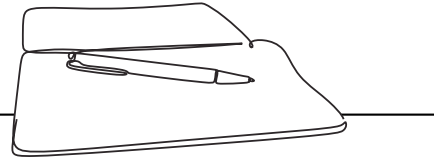
The fresh fruit industry holds significant opportunities. In a country with unacceptably high unemployment and an underperforming economy, the industry sub-sectors can supply sustainable job creation and higher export earnings, all with renewable resources. But this growth is dependent on international receivers' demand for our produce. We also need the critical building blocks to allow access to every possible global market. Industry is reliant on the government for negotiation of broader market access, optimisation of access conditions, and market retention. Prevailing global protectionism must be combatted with an energetic, engaging, committed, and well-resourced South African civil service. The current approach of government to this task will not adequately realise the market access goals for industry growth. Government requires specialised material to engage effectively with the leaders in international

export destinations. Thus, industry players work tirelessly and invest an enormous amount of growers' money in research and development. But unfortunately, this is not used optimally. Change is needed.

Looking back at the CGA Board meeting agenda of December 2000, it included statutory levies, commercialisation of cultivars, citrus black spot (CBS) workshops, export coordination, the tree census, estimates, and the setting of standards. Some things stay the same. But with meaningful change we can prevent stagnation to the detriment of the entire South African agricultural economy and its many dependents.

Thank you to the amazing fresh fruit industry family in Southern Africa, for allowing me to work towards change as part of this remarkable collective, and to share my hope that the vision of inclusive growth will be realised. 🍊

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