

"Go out into the sunlight and be happy with what you see" Winston Churchill

RESEARCH SECURES SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA'S CITRUS (Dr Vaughan Hattingh)

Internationally recognised research done by Citrus Research International (CRI), and its network of collaborative research associations, is helping secure southern Africa's citrus industry against the threats of diseases and pests, and make the best technical knowledge and services available to growers. Export citrus contributes around R30 billion annually to the South African economy and provides employment to 140 000 people on farm level. Without top level research on a wide range of technical issues, the industry would falter and export markets would close.

Renewed support for the region's exceptional plant health vigilance was offered at the 12th Citrus Research Symposium, held in the Central Drakensberg from 19 - 21 August, and hosted by the CRI. Held every two years, the symposium has become one of the largest agricultural conferences in South Africa. 850 delegates attended, representing citrus growers, packhouses, exporters, international research partners, nurseries and supportive industries such as packaging, logistics and agrichemicals.

Currently, the South African government is involved in two historic trade disputes at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) regarding the European Union's citrus import regulations. The cases concern False Codling Moth (FCM) and Citrus Black Spot (CBS), both having been the subject of extensive research to enable effective control.

At the symposium, new research results on FCM were presented by researchers, including a novel FCM detection technique using the analysis of scent, as well as the fine tuning of postharvest treatments of fruit to eliminate the presence of any surviving FCM larvae. Highlights on CBS research included a new matrix for CBS risk assessment of individual orchards that can assist growers, while another study identified naturally antifungal compounds in citrus rinds which could become part of an environmentally sustainable remedy for CBS.

"Information on plant diseases and pests might seem highly technical or obscure, but when you know that so many jobs and income depend on keeping citrus healthy, then it places it all in context," said Dr Aruna Manrakhan, Research Entomologist at the CRI. "For instance, at the symposium a researcher calculated that it costs the citrus industry R386 million per year to counter the fruit fly. Always improving is an economic imperative."

Another topic of keen discussion at the symposium was Huanglongbing (HLB) also known as Asian Citrus Greening. Southern Africa is completely free from the disease, but it has recently devastated citrus industries in some other major citrus production regions in world, such as Florida.

Details of the CRI's partnership with the University of Florida on HLB resistant rootstock was also presented at the symposium.

"Breeding disease resistant rootstocks takes time, but research on HLB resistance is looking promising. South Africa has time to prepare methods that can successfully avoid the HLB nightmare that has taken place in other countries and maintain production of export quality fruit," said Dr Paul Cronjé, Citriculture Portfolio Manager at CRI.

Working alongside the South African government to bolster biosecurity and market access is an important priority for CRI, together with enabling citrus growers to sustainably provide top quality citrus fruit to consumers around the world. The CRI currently funds and co-ordinates 131 active research projects and operates a wide-ranging research partnership model that encompasses 22 local and international research collaborations.

"We export to over 100 countries, and when consumers are enjoying South African citrus' superior quality and taste, they don't think of the enormous network of important role-players and events like the symposium, or the workshops, study groups, courses and other technology transfer channels," said Hannes Bester, National Extension Manager at CRI. "We give consumers a great product, and at events like this we take pride in the dedicated efforts of all role-players."

PACKED AND SHIPPED

End of Week 33 Million 15 Kg Cartons	Packed	Packed	Packed	Shipped	Shipped	Original Estimate	Latest Prediction	Final Packed	Vision 260
SOURCE: PPECB/AGRIHUB	2022	2023	2024	2023	2024	2024	2024	2023	2024
Grapefruit	16.5 m	13.3 m	13.7 m	12.8 m	13.1 m	16.8 m	15 m	14.7 m	16.2 m
Mandarins	29.5 m	34.6 m	36.3 m	29.5 m	29.5 m	43.0 m	42 m	38.0 m	39.6 m
Lemons	35.5 m	35.4 m	33 m	33.9 m	30.8 m	37.9 m	33.9 m	35.6 m	39.0 m
Navels	27 m	24.7 m	22.4 m	21.4 m	18.6 m	25.7 m	22.8 m	24.8 m	22.3 m
Valencia	31.9 m	33.4 m	27.4 m	23.5 m	18.7 m	58.3 m	49.6 m	52.0 m	55.4 m
Total	140.4 m	141.4 m	132.8 m	121.1 m	110.7 m	181.7m	163.3 m	165.1 m	172.5 m