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Week 13/26

FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO

"The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists." (Japanese Proverb)

CITRUS EXPORTS AND THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

The conflict in the Middle East has now continued for a month and its ripple effects are certainly being felt globally. This coming citrus season initially posed promise: the Northern Hemisphere's citrus harvest was expected to conclude earlier than usual, creating openings for South Africa. It is now clear that the season will require thoughtful coordination and strengthened collaboration.

The Middle East has long been an important market for our citrus. Disruptions in both demand and in shipping - as well as the international knock-on effect of shipping delays - are risks that everybody should be cognisant of.

Shipping rates, too, have risen sharply. At the same time, certain Gulf markets maintain price ceilings on retail citrus, limiting the ability of exporters to recover these higher logistical costs.

Global tensions are also affecting several key inputs across agricultural economies. Fuel and fertiliser prices will be affected. We are already receiving reports of constrained fuel supply domestically, along with projections of a notable fuel price increase in April. Given that fuel represents a significant portion of farming operational costs - from irrigation to transport - this is an area that warrants close attention.

Our industry is facing mounting pressures. Attention must be given to factors which are within South Africa's control. We must secure and unlock the potential of our citrus export sector. A number of constraints can be addressed.

Enhanced market access remains a high-value opportunity. Continued engagement with government and trade partners to improve tariff conditions in China, India, and the United States would unlock meaningful growth and diversify our risk profile.

Logistics performance remains central to industry competitiveness. Improving efficiency within the national port and rail network is essential, and it should be supported by much greater urgency on expanding private-sector participation.

Securing a better future of our industry through resolving of the European Union's restrictive and scientifically unsubstantiated phytosanitary requirements for South African citrus is also something within South Africa's control.

In the coming season, coordinated export planning will be crucial. The CGA will continue providing timely, data-driven market intelligence to help exporters and growers make informed decisions

Our industry has faced highly challenging seasons before, and each time we have emerged stronger. With clear focus, unified effort, and continued innovation, we will succeed.

INTERESTING FACTS

The Citrus Improvement Scheme, managed by Citrus Research International, currently has 565 different citrus cultivars as part of the scheme, housed at the Citrus Foundation Block in the Eastern Cape.