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Newsletter | July/August 2021

CEO's note

I can't think of a better time to be part of the food narrative than now, and for the fruit industry to partake meaningfully in the discourse.

Though, the devastating economic impact of the unrest that broke out in KZN and Gauteng recently is major cause for agricultural and countrywide concern – particularly, regarding the transportation of food and fruit destined for the Durban port.

But despite the hampering COVID-19 pandemic, the fruit industry has remained resilient, with production output maintaining an upward trajectory. And innovative solutions like the industry's proactive introduction of eCert in 2018, along with government, are proving extremely useful given the growing need for paperless processing of information. In fact, the significance of eCert was reaffirmed in the recent SHAFFE/Freshfel electronic phytosanitary certification webinar, which Fruit SA was a part of. The webinar highlighted lessons from countries that champion these systems, and explored means to bring businesses (especially financial institutions) on board.

From a macro-economic perspective, in his budget vote speech, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition, Ebrahim Patel said that the COVID-19 pandemic has left SA's economy "deeply scarred", with many job losses in the lower-income sector, as well as severe economic damage to many businesses. "More than 10 million South Africans willing to work are unemployed," lamented Patel. And with Stats SA's reported Q1 record unemployment rate of 32.6%, and 46.8% for women, job creation remains critical – with women continuing to play a vital role in the agricultural sector and the overall economy.

For ongoing market access and job creation, the industry relies on government's leadership to negotiate favourable international trade agreements.

And on the transformation front, I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2020 Fruit Industry Value Chain Roundtable Transformation review. We will be sharing highlights of the review in future editions of our newsletter and through other communication platforms.

Pictured: *Mono Mashaba, Market Development Specialist*

Fruit SA's Gain, Retain and Optimisation (GRO) strategy

Towards the end of 2020, as the country was battling the second wave of COVID-19 infections, we were all hoping that 2021 would start taking the virus in hand.

But here we are in the third quarter of 2021, knee-high in the third wave of infections. An accelerated vaccine rollout is essential to curb the spread of the virus, and to support economic activity and of course, market access.

Against this unsettling backdrop, we are grateful that the fruit industry has continued to play its part in ensuring global food security, despite the devastating effects of the pandemic. This is particularly significant given that the industry has also had to navigate new regulations imposed by importing countries, to mitigate pandemic-related risks.

Implementing Fruit SA's Gain, Retain and Optimisation (GRO) strategy has remained a challenge in the prevailing environment. The invaluable public-private partnership with DALRRD (Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development) has been instrumental in enabling the industry to achieve its GRO objectives by pushing against the artificial boundaries created by COVID-19.

And it's a real boon that the Chinese government has decided to conduct inspections for citrus and table grapes virtually. The industry looks forward to other countries in its export market doing likewise.

Speaking of export markets, after conclusion of the protocol in October 2020, the celebratory mood around the first shipment of citrus to the Philippines still prevails. This follows 12 years of negotiations. The South African Embassy in Manila along with DALRRD, were key role-players in this development, which will produce much-needed jobs and foreign exchange earnings.

But accelerated implementation of Fruit SA's GRO is largely dependent on the traction of the government's vaccination programme. So, we remain positive that relief will soon be in sight.

Transformation

HORTGRO
Growing Fruit IQ

Haarlem community – a heartening story of pursued land ownership

Pictured: *Nico Du Preez*

In 1963 government (the then Coloured Affairs Department) bought Anhalt Farm, because the Haarlem Dam (a drinking water dam) was on Portion 10 of the farm. This was a significant socio-economic investment for the local community.

The land remained dormant until 1993, when the Cape Agency for Sustainable Integrated Development in Rural Areas (Casidra) took possession.

In 2002 Casidra appointed Nico Du Preez as general worker at Anhalt Farm, and he climbed the ranks to manager in 2015. In the meantime, Nico had also joined the Haarlem Communal Property Association (CPA) in 2005, which sought ownership of the farm for the Haarlem community through transfer from government.

Through hard work and a will to succeed, a number of dedicated people have transformed this once dormant farm into the productive enterprise it is today.

To date, the CPA has contributed financially to local schools and churches, amongst others. And hopes remain high that soon the income generated on Anhalt Farm will improve the lives of the locals significantly. Nico is also delighted that he could attend Fruit Logistica Berlin through sponsorship from the DFDC (Deciduous Fruit Development Chamber) and the WCDoA (Western Cape Department of Agriculture).

“We now farm for ourselves and I am now employed as manager of Anhalt Farm by my very own community,” beams Nico.

Representation of women

The fruit industry continues to demonstrate its commitment to driving gender equity, though much remains to be done.

In this edition, it seemed apt to revisit the findings in the “Women in Agriculture” Report produced jointly by SIZA and the WCDoA (Western Cape Department of Agriculture) in 2020.

This research study sought to allow brands and suppliers a glimpse into how women are represented in SA’s agricultural sector, as well as how they have been emancipated and where improvements are still required.

Quantitatively, the report found a marginal decrease nationally in the gap between the total number of male and female employees; that most women working in agriculture are 26 years or older; and that respondents showed partiality towards employing women, with the senior female workforce hovering above industry pay benchmarks. And with an increase in the adoption of new technologies, it's heartening for women that physical strength needs no longer be a prerequisite for being employed in agriculture.

On the qualitative front, amongst the reasons cited by respondents for a larger female workforce in agriculture were empathy, problem-solving skills, and effective communication. Amongst the barriers to entry were physical strength, perceptions, and motherhood and childcare.

Importantly, these were some of the respondents' recommendations for preservation of women's dignity: easy access to affordable training, family and parenting support, creating safe channels to report discrimination, and conducting interviews with women at all levels, to better understand their needs.

We look forward to keep celebrating collectively the meaningful strides made by industry to narrow the gender divide.

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fpef fresh produce EXPORTERS' FORUM SOUTH AFRICA

When you're driven by gratitude

Pictured: *Karabelo Motsei*

In the spirit of Women's Month, we salute women like Karabelo Motsei from FPEF (Fresh Produce Exporters' Forum's), who are making their mark in the sector. Karabelo is one of a number of young role-players who stand head and shoulders above the rest. After obtaining a BCom Economics degree and a postgraduate qualification in Business Administration, she decided to veer in agriculture.

Driven by the power of gratitude, this Export Account Manager from Ideafruit has her sights set high.

She reports to Pieter Oelofse, the General Manager of Wholesale and Programmes, and ensures that their export market (Middle East, Far East and Asia, Rotterdam, and Russia) is optimally serviced.

"At Ideafruit, every day comes with a new challenge, which excites me and gives me an opportunity to learn," says Karabelo.

She attributes her growth at the company to senior management allowing her the space to grow.

"Also, my family is my biggest motivation, not forgetting my colleagues. To thrive in the industry, one needs to have the right attitude: being open to accepting challenges and tackling tasks that drive continued growth," highlights Karabelo.

Asked to share the most valuable lesson she's learnt in the industry, Karabelo intuitively answers: "To work hard in any given task and to be committed. Every experience adds value, if we pay attention."

As for COVID-19, her infected sister counting amongst her pandemic related challenges. She points out that the pandemic has taught her that gratitude is a powerful state of mind.

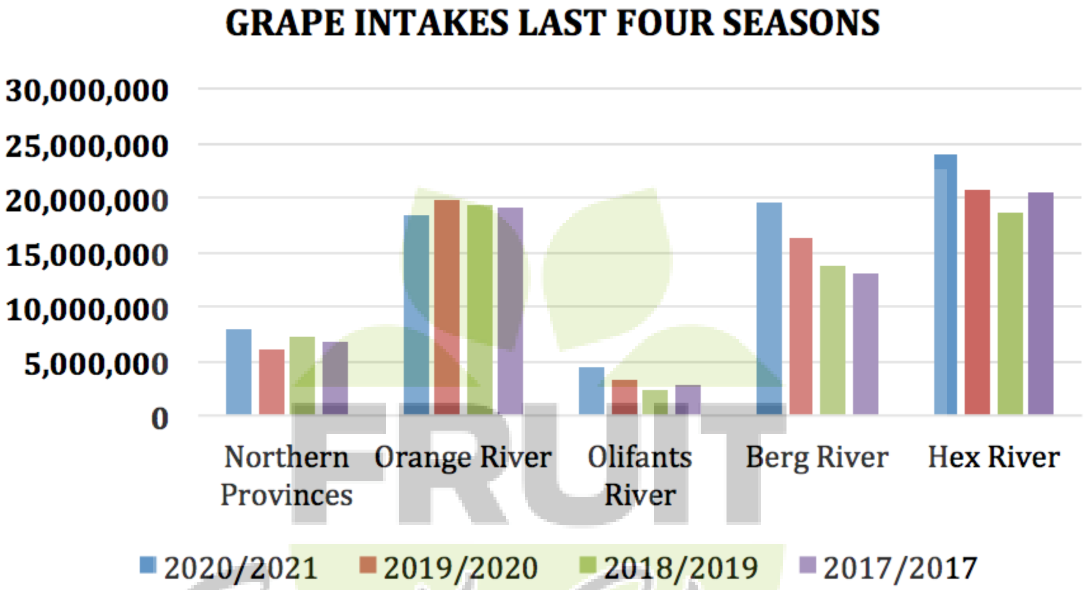
Personalising success, Karabelo puts it down to "Knowing that hardships and proverbial mountains will arise, but having the courage to continue, regardless."

SATI
SOUTH AFRICAN TABLE GRAPE INDUSTRY

Season report

The 2020/21 table grape harvest ended on a new volume high with nearly 75 million cartons (4.5 kg equivalent) inspected for export (intakes), beating the previous record (2016/17 season) by 10%.

The enclosed graph (fig 1) shows intakes in the previous four seaons. For the 2020/21 seasons, intake in the Orange River declined after heavy rains during the first week of harvest. For the Western Cape regions, weather conditions were mostly favourable. Plus, new high-yielding cultivars planted in the previous years came into production, resulting in higher packed volumes for 2020/21 and offsetting crop losses in the Orange River region. The geographical diversity of SA’s five table grape production regions is a definite advantage that ensures continuous supply to key markets by absorbing regional environmental risks.



China lemons

Friday 18 June marked yet another victory for the citrus industry.

Joined virtually by the People’s Republic of China and industry representatives, Minister Didiza signed the revised citrus protocol for lemons. At the time of writing, implementation of the protocol was still pending the signature of the Minister in China.

The revised citrus protocol contains key revisions pertaining to the cold treatment of False Codling Moth (FCM) for lemons, which will open the way for this fruit to enter the Chinese market. In essence, the previous cold treatment requirement limited lemon exports to China, as they were at risk of cold damage.

During this landmark online event, His Excellency Ambassador Chen highlighted significant trade ties between the two countries – especially citrus trade, while Minister Didiza drew attention to other ties of equal importance between the two countries.

In 2020 SA exported more than 130 000 metric tonnes of citrus to China, which constitutes 6% of total exports to that country, and confirms it as a leading importer of SA's citrus.

BERRIES ZA
SUPPORTING SOUTH AFRICAN GROWERS

Production and exports on a continued upward trajectory

South African blueberry exports are forecast to increase by 63% this coming season.

Exports are expected to increase from last season's 15,800 to 25,000 tonnes for the 2021/22 season. And total production of blueberries is anticipated to reach 36,000 tonnes.

This significant growth is attributable to the maturing of blueberry blocks, resulting in an increase in the total fruit per plant. The majority of our fruit is still coming from the Western Cape, with substantial early volumes coming from the northern parts of SA, including Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West and Gauteng.

At this stage SA's blueberries will be exported to traditional markets, with larger volumes destined for continental Europe, followed by the UK. Other markets include – but are not limited to – the Middle East, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Russia and the Indian Ocean Islands.

With this surge in volume growth, the berry industry also anticipates more fruit in the local market this season.
