



ED'S NOTE

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We have reached the end of the year and looking back at the whole of 2023 I am once again struck by the resilience of our black citrus growers.

The citrus industry faced immense challenges this year. Yet we kept going. We persevered. And as the year draws to a close we can say it was, overall, a better year than the one before.

Our final export figures showed an increase from the packed figures of last year, but it is unfortunately below the levels we're aiming at to reach our long-term goals.

The CGA-GDC is focussed on the target of exporting, by 2032, 50 million cartons of citrus grown on the farms of black growers. We still have a lot of work to do in the years that lie ahead. But I hope that this newsletter will show you that our goals can still be achieved.

You will read about the hard-working and talented Lavhengwa Nemoarani, who was honoured in the 2023 Toyota New Harvest of the Year competition. We can be very proud of him. He is just one example of the many impressive black citrus growers in our industry.

You will be impressed to know that a network of knowledge and skills exchange is being maintained and expanded through tools like our Information Days and our Study Groups. Representatives of the CGA-

GDC travel across our beautiful country - from one citrus region to another - to make sure that our community of growers remains strong, and that it expands! Placing further emphasis on the importance of knowledge, the wonderful work of the Citrus Academy in empowering citrus workers to further their careers should be acknowledged. You can read about how the Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers (ETBCG) programme's training component changes lives every year.

Then, be inspired by the Agri's Got Talent competition, which shows that agriculture is more than just orchards and exports - it is about being a community, about people assisting in empowering each other, about celebrating together.

And on the topic of celebrations: With 2023 behind us all, the CGA-GDC wishes all the members of the citrus industry and their families a great festive season, a very happy new year, and some well-deserved days of rest as well!

Lukhanyo Nkombisa is the Managing Director of the CGA-GDC

MESSAGE FROM THE CGA CEO



In the 2023 export season Southern African citrus growers packed 165.1 million (15kg) cartons for delivery to global markets. While this is an increase of approximately 800 000 from the packed figures of last year, it is still 500 000 cartons lower than the forecast at the start of the season and more importantly, substantially below the anticipated growth curve based on plantings that can see the industry potentially hitting 200 million cartons in the next 4 years, and possibly 260 million cartons by 2032. This highlights that growers continued to face a number of challenges when it comes to getting their fruit to key markets.

These challenges included sustained high levels of load shedding. The general surge in farming input costs continued during the 2023 season and placed pressure on growers. Devastating floods in the Western Cape in June also impacted farms in that province.

Another significant challenge was the worsening logistics crisis, which has paralysed large segments of our country's export economy. Congestion at ports and a dysfunctional freight rail network has cost farmers dearly and is, in effect, halting growth opportunities for the citrus industry. The CGA continues to engage with Transnet on these issues, but is in full support of Transnet expediting public-private partnerships both in the ports and the rail system as a matter of urgency.

Perhaps the biggest challenge faced by the industry this season has been an intensification of the unjustified phytosanitary regulations imposed on our

growers by the European Union (EU). Taken together, the unnecessary protocols and proactive measures against Citrus Black Spot (CBS) and False Codling Moth (FCM) are costing the local citrus industry R3.7 billion annually.

But even considering these challenges, one should acknowledge that after an extremely challenging two years, where only one in five growers made a profit, this year's better market prices and reduced shipping costs offered a measure of relief to many growers. We are grateful for this small measure of relief.

Looking at particular cultivars, this year's exports figures sketches a complicated picture. This year 1.9 million less cartons of Grapefruit were packed for export than in 2022. Mandarin exports continue to increase substantially. This past season 37.9 million cartons were packed, an increase of 6.1 million year-on-year and 3.8 million more than estimated at the start of the season. Lemons also showed an increase. 900 000 more cartons were packed this past season, however, this was 1.3 million cartons less than the pre-season estimate. Oranges have shown a decrease overall. This year 24.7 million cartons of Navels were packed, 3.1 million less than last year, and slightly below the estimate. Valencias also recorded a decrease - 1.7 million cartons less, with a total of 52.1 million cartons packed.

The CGA would like to thank its members for their hard work during 2023 and as 2024 approaches we wish everyone in the citrus industry a rest, peace and just the best for the new year.



CITRUS GROWER RECOGNISED FOR HIS AGRICULTURAL TALENT

Lavhengwa Nemoarani is a second generation citrus farmer. His father, Israel, served on the CGA Board for many years. After his father passed away, Lavhengwa now runs the family farm along with his wife Meme.

The farm's name is Muka-tangi and it is near Masikhwa in Limpopo. With over 130 ha of citrus orchards, it is a thriving endeavour, producing Navels and Valencias for the export market.

Lavhengwa was recognised in the 2023 Toyota New Harvest of the Year competition, reaching the top 5 and receiving a trophy. The New Harvest category acknowledges rising stars and fresh talent in the world of agriculture.

His father, Israel, was similarly honoured in this category in 2009. Like father, like son.

Lukhanyo Nkombisa, General Manager of the CGA-GDC congratulated Lavhengwa: "We are so proud of him. It is always great to see somebody that the GDC has assisted get the acknowledgement they deserve. It is a very competitive category and he has lifted the flag of citrus high. Recognition like this on a national platform is encouraging and motivating to upcoming farmers, especially young farmers who take over from their parents, with farming in their blood."

Lavhengwa is a father of four. He says he much rather prefers being out in the orchards, on the tractor, spraying trees, rather than sitting in the office doing administrative work.

On how he feels about his success in the competition he responded, "I am honoured by the trophy and grateful for the exposure as well."





At the award ceremony in Kempton Park, Gauteng, Jaco Minnaar, the CEO of Agri SA praised all the top candidates. "The finalists in the Young Farmer, New Harvest, and Communal Farming Association of the Year competition are like the Springboks of agriculture. Every one of them has a special vision that they strive for, and they never lose sight of their end goal. That's why they are so successful in what they do."

The adjudication process for the competition was very rigorous. Selected candidates were visited by adjudicators who spent hours interviewing the candidate and auditing the farm's finances. The team of judges included experts in the fields of agronomy, soil science and production economy.

The team also took extended field trips through the farms where they engaged with the candidates about the activities on the farms and their management methods. Farm worker premises were also visited.

Lavhengwa's success is an example of how black citrus growers are contributing more and more to their industry.

He encapsulates everything the CGA-GDC strives for - a grower with a love for the land, generating jobs and revenue, keeping South Africa a world-class exporter of quality citrus.

GROWING SKILL, KNOWLEDGE & CONNECTIONS IN THE INDUSTRY

Often focus is placed on the finances or economics of transformation in agriculture. While financial support for emerging farmers is of immense importance, the sharing of skills and knowledge amongst black farmers are also a key to a completely transformed South African agriculture.

The CGA-GDC knows this and that is why it puts a lot of emphasis on its Study Groups and Information Days. These are just two of the tools used to make sure there is a supportive network of shared information and expertise among the citrus growers we support.

The most recent study meeting and information day, both held in November, are examples of why the knowledge-driven approach is so successful.

A Information Day was held at Elandskraal Projects (Victor Masilo's farm) in Mooiooi, North West, on 23 November. A total of 52 people attended the gathering - farmers, interns, students from agricultural colleges, members of the CGA-GDC and government officials.

Information Days are an opportunity for all relevant stakeholders in the development of black citrus growers to come together and share available opportunities for farmers. This includes government departments, financial institutions, and suppliers who play a major role in the industry.

Ten topics were discussed in total, including Cultivar Breeders Rights, Citrus Black Spot Management, Citrus Tree Canopy Management, Agro-Energy and Blended Finance, as well as two sessions on funding initiatives.

"Information days are important for the CGA-GDC as it brings all the relevant stakeholders together. Growers are accorded an opportunity to share their challenges with funders and suppliers. The growers can also move around stalls for more information on what the suppliers are currently showcasing and selling," explains Andrew Mbedzi, Production and Technical Support Unit Manager at the CGA-GDC.





The Information days always have an atmosphere of pleasant fellowship - as all there share the same goal. Study groups are much more frequent events, held throughout the year across the country in citrus-growing areas. A recent one took place on the 7th of November in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga. 34 people attended the session. The purpose of the citrus study groups is to encourage farmers to network and work together to resolve common production and marketing challenges. One focus area in the Nelspruit meeting was citrus spring pest control, covered in detail by the CGA-GDC's Melton Mulaudzi. As an example of the type of knowledge shared: Many of those who attended found the future use of a specific plant protection booklet very exciting. Furthermore, the citrus study groups are also used as a platform to communicate the CGA-GDC Enterprise Development Fund and Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers programme criteria and application procedures to the growers. The event like citrus study group is important because it facilitates exchanges between growers, producers, suppliers, agricultural advisors and other relevant parties. They discuss industry challenges and strategies. It also creates a platform where farmers can share resources and inform each other of opportunities. Furthermore, it helps growers keep up with the fast-moving trends in the citrus market.



LEARNERSHIPS

THAT TRANSFORM CITRUS

The CGA is the cornerstone of the immensely successful Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers (ETBCG) programme. The CGA's Citrus Academy also oversees the programme's skills and training component. Candidates are empowered through a year-long learnership. Meet some of the many beneficiaries of the training, whose talents were developed so that they can further their careers in a thriving and transformed citrus industry.

Babalwa Thys, 38, is a Fruit Delivery Controller from the Sunday's River Valley in the Eastern Cape. She feels the Citrus Business Management learnership has opened up possibilities for her. "Way back I thought the citrus industry was just for farmers, but now I know about all the opportunities agriculture has. I learned a lot about the South African economy." The learnership made her more interested in educating herself further. She is also full of praise for the facilitators: "They were incredible. They know what they are doing. They explain things so clearly." Babalwa is proud to be in the citrus industry and says citrus people just see things differently, they have a unique love of the land.

Clemend Laurence Bird, 34, works at Bergendal in Citrusdal. Last year he benefited from a Plant Production learnership. He found the unit concerning basic soil fertility and plant nutrition especially interesting. "I now even look differently at the trees," he says. He also valued delving into the details of the packing and movement of export fruit. "When you see the citrus leaving the farm, all packed, you are proud. You think, 'I was part of that process' - and that fruit is now being enjoyed in America." The learnership inspired him to pursue further agricultural education and he is currently studying farming management.

Meet Benelea Mentoor, 30, from the Citrusdal region. She works as a team leader in the orchards of the area. She says the learnership has helped her a lot. "I learned so much about communication, about how important it is, in any work." The course content on irrigation stood out for her - how essential but also how complicated it actually is. She said that finding time to study while working and taking care of her child was a challenge, especially since she recently lost her own mother. But she knows persevering was worth it. "I believe it will make a difference to my future." Asked if she would consider educating herself further, she answered: "Yes, of course!"

Cheslin Ryno Ryners, 29, works in the Sunday's River Valley. He was a Quality Control Supervisor when he started a Citrus Business Management learnership last year. It has helped him move on to become a successful Fruit Receiving Officer. "I'll be honest, it was difficult in the beginning, but as soon as I got use to the learning work, it went very well. It has meant a lot to me." Cheslin says apart from more technical knowledge, the learnership improved his leadership skills and inspired him to think more about the future and what it can hold for him.

In November the ETBCG's new 2023/2024 learnerships in Plant Production have commenced in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.



Babalwa Thys



Clemend Bird



Benelea Mentor



Cheslin Ryners





MUCH, MUCH MORE THAN A SINGING COMPETITION!

The much-loved Agri's Got Talent has been around for 10 years. In this competition farm, packhouse and cellar workers in the fruit and wine industries regularly stun the public with their voice talents.

But it is much more than just a showcase for singing talent. Through the years, Agri's Got Talent has changed many lives. It has done this through inspiring confidence, encouraging ambition, fostering dreams and developing important life skills. A dedicated life skills programme has been part of the recipe that has made it such a meaningful longterm project.

"The project reaches further than just the top contestants and their families. Over the years, previous contestants have become true ambassadors for their employers, farms, packhouses, and communities. They have inspired their colleagues and made a real difference in their communities, some becoming involved in youth and other upliftment projects or sharing their singing skills," explains the organisers.

The CGA is one of the main supporters of Agri's Got Talent. Justin Chadwick, CEO of CGA, said: "The citrus industry was a later addition to AGT – we watched from the sidelines as those in the other fruit industries were showcased, eventually getting our chance to compete in 2019. Since becoming involved, we have benefitted from those who went ahead; now citrus is an integral part of this well-organised and professional contest."

The citrus industry has been well represented over the past few years. Two recent singers who dazzled everyone with their voice talents stand out.

Nonkululeko Sambo, 27, was the winner of Agri's Got Talent in 2019, as a worker from KMI Farming in Nelspruit. Flying to the gala event in 2019 was the first time she was on an airplane. That night she brought the house down with Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah". She is still in the citrus industry, now a scout manager. "I was so frightened in the beginning of the competition, but the experience taught me to stop doubting myself. It gave me self-confidence," she says.

Nonkululeko is passionate about the citrus industry, especially about fruit nutrition, and she valued the support people in the industry gave her during the competition.

Jack Jonas, 45, was second runner up in in 2021. He is a maintenance assistant at the Citrus Foundation Block in Uitenhage. The competition meant a lot to him. He describes himself as reserved and withdrawn before the competition. "It showed me how to open up. It opened me up socially," he says.





Jack values the close bonds formed during the competition between other participants. "It was amazing how fast we clicked, and we still keep in touch today, like a family."

This year, Agri's Got Talent took on a completely different form - a 10 year reunion roadshow. Many events were held across the country to celebrate. Agricultural hubs in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Langkloof and the Western Cape formed part of the roadshow. Past winners and top singers from previous competitions were seen in action, with a culmination on the 18th of November at the Paarl Amphitheatre in the Boland.

It was a spectacular night with truly world-class musical performances. It showed that when it comes to music and song, the South African fruit industry can proudly step onto the stage and into the spotlights. Ayabonga Mhobo, the very first winner of Agri's Got Talent, also took part in the event, showing that the magic of this project stretches back a full decade.

At the event the Western Cape minister for Agriculture, Dr Ivan Meyer said: "This is an investment in culture and in the cultural landscape of the agriculture sector."



Jack Jonas



Nonkululeko Sambo





We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our members, as well as the various role-players and officials in the wider industry that make the citrus community such a meaningful one to be a part of.

We hope your Christmas will be filled with peace and plenty. And that you and your loved ones will be blessed with a prosperous new year.