**PRESS STATEMENT BY JUSTIN CHADWICK – 20 April 2020**

**CEO OF CITRUS GROWERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**Increased global demand for citrus bodes well for the 2020 export season**

As South Africa moves into its fourth week of a national lockdown, the citrus industry continues to focus on ensuring consumers have access to fresh citrus fruit while safeguarding the health of its workers.

In this regard we are pleased to have seen an increase in demand for lemons from overseas markets, with 4,5 million cartons having been shipped to date – double the 2019 volumes at the same time (1,8 million cartons). The bulk of these shipments (64%) have been shipped to the Middle East, while Russia shipments have increased from 9 to 12%. Shipping of soft citrus (424 000 cartons to date) and grapefruit (411 000 cartons to date) are similar to the previous year exports at this time.

However, we acknowledge that these unprecedented times could threaten business continuity, which is why the Citrus Growers’ Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has established a Covid-19 Response Committee (CRC). The committee will identify risks and opportunities arising from the pandemic and national lockdown and develop plans to address these issues going forward.

The CRC met for the first time last week and identified a number of risks that could affect the current export season including: operational and efficiency issues at ports; ensuring the health and safety of workers; transporting of workers to farms and citrus to ports; ensuring business continuity of supporting industries; obtaining necessary documentation for exports (e.g. phytosanitary certificates, shipping cargo receipts); the continuation of fruit inspection services and finally, the cost and availability of ships.

The CGA is working closely with various stakeholders including government departments, organized agriculture and the National Joint Command Centre to mitigate these risks. However, challenges at some ports remain the biggest threat to the current citrus season.

Staff shortages and labour protests have affected operations at Cape Town and Durban ports over the past few weeks. A back-up of non-essential containers that have not been moved or unpacked has also caused bottlenecks at ports.

These issues have been raised with Transnet management and the National Joint Command Centre, and we welcome the steps taken to increase staff capacity at all ports as well as recent amendments to the Disaster Management Act regulations to allow for the movement of both essential and non-essential cargo at ports. The CGA will continue to monitor the situation and engage with Transnet and government to unblock any further blockages at our country’s ports.

Despite these risks, we remain cautiously optimistic when it comes to the current export season. The CGA remains committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure it meets its responsibilities and uses its privileged position as an essential food producer wisely during the national lockdown.

**Media Enquires**

Justin Chadwick

+27 83 654 9591