

REPORT

—South Africa



Hail SIZA

SOMERSET WEST—The sustainability initiative is leaving its mark on the South African industry, propelling the country's fresh produce business into a world-leading position.

by Fred Meintjes

SIZA is designed to not only serve the fresh fruit sector, but is also increasingly expanding throughout South Africa's agricultural industry in general

For more than four decades South African fruit growers have been under intense scrutiny as far as ethical trading, labour and social conditions are concerned, perhaps more so than any other major fresh produce exporting country – the result of South Africa's own painful political history which today, 25 years since the founding of the new democracy, is still having an effect on how the fresh fruit industry is viewed both externally and internally.

The exciting news about this level of scrutiny is the fact that over the years the industry has developed a sustainable ethical trade system that is rapidly growing in importance. It is unmatched elsewhere in the world and places the industry in a unique position to enhance its reputation both within and outside South Africa.

"The Sustainable Initiative of South Africa (SIZA) has grown exponentially over the past couple of years," says Retha Louw, the initiative's chief executive. "Not only has our membership more than doubled over the past three years, but the SIZA leadership has rolled out several additions to our programme. An example is the Beyond Audit programme which allows our members to showcase best practices on farms that move beyond compliance."

SIZA is designed to not only serve the fresh fruit sector, but is increasingly expanding throughout agriculture in general. However, the fruit sector has been the driver behind this development and still makes up around 80 per cent of membership.

"We are absolutely proud of what we have been able to achieve," Louw continues. "South Africa is the only country in the world that has its own Ethical and Sustainability programme and technical platform. The industry was made aware of the challenges it faces globally and SIZA not only played a role in measuring these challenges but aligning it with solutions and positive outcomes. The image of South Africa's fruit export industry is one of confidence and reliability."

Louw says the challenges for SIZA definitely include the precarious relationship between produce suppliers and the retail industry. "The market determines compliance for suppliers. To allow for continuous improvements amongst all our members and strive for a "beyond audit/compliance" mindset, minimum requirements should not be a focal point anymore. The attitude should be that of striving to be

even better than what is required so that we can move to a beyond audit approach where growers take responsibility for their ethical and environmental practices."

SIZA will continue to endorse South African growers globally. "However a challenge we will face is providing continuous assurance to the market if all growers do not work together to ensure a prosperous environment," she notes. "It only takes one or two growers from an industry to tarnish the image of the entire trade."

Expanding the SIZA footprint into a more multi-sector agri-wide industry is the ideal aim, Louw confirms. "This is something of a challenge as other industries might not be as familiar with the standards and requirements of the global trade. The challenge will be to phase SIZA's presence into these markets."

Louw adds that SIZA aims to enable South African Agriculture to become a global leader in ethical trade, ensuring a sustainable, responsible and environmentally improved industry across the value chain. **E**

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ABOVE—Retha Louw, chief executive officer of SIZA