CITRUS EXPORTS

Stricter quality control needed for citrus exports

Industry experts have warned that the anticipated increase in citrus production will necessitate the streamlining of the export process to prevent an increase in shipments being rejected at foreign ports.

Speaking at a recent workshop on citrus exports at Citrus Research International in Mbombela, Mitchell Brooke, logistics manager at the association, said a substantial increase in citrus production was expected in South Africa over the coming years.

"We'll see an increase of 22% in mandarin and lemon production between 2020 and 2022," he said.

"The entire supply chain will need to be geared to handle the increase. This includes transport, cold storage and port infrastructure."

Currently, the greatest challenges facing inspectors at ports were incorrect export certificates, incorrect marking requirements, poor condition of pallets, and quality issues, according to the Perishable Products Export Control Board's cold chain manager, Vijan Chetty.

Bookings for orchard inspections were also not made timeously, he added.

There had been a 9% year-on-year increase in citrus fruit being rejected at South African ports. Approximately 74% of these were due to false codling moth, followed by blemishes and decay.

A specialist in post-harvest physiology at Stellenbosch University's Department of Horticultural Science, Dr Paul Cronje, warned that the industry had to remain focused on ensuring fruit quality was not compromised and consignments met export requirements.

"Chilling injury on fruit is one of the biggest culprits and can be prevented by [introducing] a few simple steps," said Cronje. "This includes strict culling in the orchard and packhouse.

"Sunburnt fruit is very susceptible to chilling injury. Immature and over-mature fruit should also be discarded, as must small calibre fruit. Be quick to identify problem cultivars and orchards to minimise problems from repeating themselves."

He also recommended that farmers use a natural wax to coat the fruit rather than synthetic wax.

"A high solids wax of around 18% to 20% should be used to ensure complete covering of fruit," he said. – *Lindi Botha*

FINANCE

KZN DARD budget leaves much to be desired

Significant cutbacks in grants have been announced in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (KZN DARD) 2018/2019 provincial budget.

Delivering her budget address in Pietermaritzburg, MEC of the KZN Treasury, Belinda Scott, said the KZN DARD had been allocated R2,3 billion (2018/2019), R2,4 billion (2019/2020) and R2,6 billion (2020/2021) over the three-year medium-term expenditure framework.

While the KZN DARD's Land Care Grant for 2018/2019 remained at R12 million, Scott said that, following cost-cutting directives from National Treasury, the budget allocation for this grant would see a R985 000 decrease for 2019/2020, and a R302 000 decrease for 2020/2021.

"The Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme grant drops by R36,5 million in 2019/2020, and by R22,6 million in 2020/2021. The Ilima/Letsema projects grant under DARD receive an inflationary increase of R4,1 million in 2020/2021. This grant stands at R71,3 million, R75,3 million and R79,4 million over the medium-term expenditure framework," she said.

Thube Zondi, secretary of the KZN chapter of the African Farmers' Association of South Africa (AFASA KZN), said that while his organisation supported the 2018/2019 budget allocations, they "never expected the budgeted CASP reduction in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021, while we are having challenges of land that is increasingly not being used to its full production potential".

Zondi said that AFASA KZN was also displeased with KZN Treasury allocating funds jointly to infrastructure development projects and food and nutrition security improvement projects. He added that more money needed to be allocated to these important projects, which needed to be each separately budgeted for.

Sandy la Marque, CEO of the KZN Agricultural Union, said she was concerned the national development goals of food security, employment, and rural development, among others, could not be achieved with declining budget allocations.

"It's evident and well documented that challenges have not really changed, but rather become greater," said La Marque.

For the past few years, "the failures and non-delivery have far outweighed the intentions".

"In particular, farmers are battling the challenges that are largely driven by the economy, poor infrastructure, lack of training and capacity-building, insecurity of tenure, lack of finance, and others," she said. – *Lloyd Phillips*