

ED'S NOTE

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The citrus industry, a cornerstone of South Africa's agricultural sector, relies heavily on the tireless efforts of its growers. These dedicated individuals work year-round to produce the world-class citrus fruits that South Africa is renowned for.

As we approach the new year, it's important to acknowledge the contributions of these hard-working farmers. And they deserve a well-earned rest.

Citrus farming is a demanding occupation that requires unwavering commitment. From the early morning hours to late at night, growers tend to their orchards and co-ordinate the necessary labour.

Beyond the physical demands, citrus farming is a complex endeavour that requires a deep understanding of agricultural practices, market trends, and economic factors. Growers must constantly adapt to changing conditions, such as the climate and consumer preferences.

Despite the challenges they face, citrus growers remain passionate about their work. They take pride in producing a great product. Their commitment to excellence has earned South Africa a reputation as a leading exporter of citrus, contributing significantly to the country's economy.

An increasingly substantial part of the exports on which the citrus industry's reputation is built, is contributed by black growers. To the over 120 black citrus growers in South Africa, the GDC has been a source of support and guidance. We are proud to contribute to the continued transformation of a national asset.

This newsletter highlights issues of great importance to the GDC. Read about the future vision for black growers in South Africa, about the very exciting and very first cultivar discovery by a black grower, about the importance of training and enterprise development, and about the coming Citrus Summit next year.

As we enter 2025, it is crucial to recognise the challenges faced by growers. Climate, infrastructure, logistics, access to markets and finance, to name but a few. For the year ahead, as in the year that just passed, the GDC will be a partner to the black growers of South Africa as they continue to work hard and expand the industry.

MESSAGE FROM THE CGA CEO



It is the end of the year, and it has truly been an unusual one. There is a lot to look back on.

Unforeseen events required that we continually revise our export estimated downward. The initial estimate for total exports was 181.7 million 15kg cartons. The final figure falls 9% short of this - an export total of 164.5 million cartons.

The role weather played in the 2024 season is considerable. The abnormally hot and dry conditions during the mid to late summer period led to smaller fruit sizes. No less than three severe weather events also had an impact on exports. Freezing temperatures in Limpopo, floods in the Western Cape (Citrusdal), and strong winds that caused fruit to drop in the Eastern Cape resulted in a reduction of fruit packed for global markets.

Weather was also a factor in the global market. Largely because of severe drought in Brazil, the orange juice price skyrocketed. Brazil is the world's main orange juice supplier. Because of such a favourable juice price, a lot of local oranges were diverted to local juicing, further lowering exports.

But even considering all these serious and unusual factors, it is a remarkable achievement that exports only declined 0.3% compared to 2023. This is a testament to the resilience, hard work and long-term vision of all our growers.

Here some more detailed figures for the past season:

- This year 14.3 million cartons (15kg equivalent) of Grapefruit were packed for export. This is 300 000 less than in the 2023 season and is a 14% shortfall from the initial estimates made in April 2024.
- 41.6 million cartons of Mandarins were packed, representing a notable 3.6 million increase since the previous season. It is, however, 3% less than the initial estimate.
- Lemons showed a decrease compared to both the previous season and the estimate: 34.7 million cartons of Lemons were packed in 2024, being 9% down from the estimate and 1.1 million cartons down from 2023.
- Navel Oranges packed for export have shown an increase of 400 000 cartons compared to 2023. This year 25.1 million cartons of Navels were packed, a 2% decrease from the original estimate.
- A total of 48.7 million cartons of Valencia Oranges were packed this year. Notably, this is 4.7 million less than in the 2023 season and is a significant 16% shortfall from the initial estimates.

As we take stock of the past year, we also identify the challenges ahead of us in 2025. Most notably logistics. Improving our ports, making them more efficient, has the potential to revolutionise the entire South African export economy.

The work that the GDC has done over many years, proves that such a boost in the export economy will be an inclusive boost - black citrus growers will benefit, those they employ will benefit, and the consumers in our biggest markets (Europe, the Middle East and South East Asia, to name just three) will benefit because they value South Africa's high-quality and tasty citrus.



EMPOWERING GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Developing black growers was a central discussion point at the recent strategic meeting of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), with the Grower Development Company (GDC) representing the interests of existing and new black growers.

The GDC's vision is for more black South African citrus growers to become commercially successful enough to enjoy the economic opportunities offered by local and export markets.

Both the GDC and CGA believe that the future of black citrus growers in South Africa looks increasingly promising, thanks to targeted interventions and strategic development plans. These interventions have been led by the GDC over the past decade and is at the heart of the CGA's commitment to empowering black growers to participate to a greater extent in the agricultural economy, contributing to job creation and economic sustainability.

Over the last six months of the year, these principles have been recognised by leaders in the GNU, with President Cyril Ramaphosa mentioning the successful citrus industry model of transformation in Parliament.


South Africa's citrus industry is a global powerhouse, with our citrus being enjoyed by consumers all across the world. In 2024, the South African citrus industry exported 164.5 million 15-kg cartons of fruit.


One of the primary objectives is to expand black grower participation in the citrus export market, where the potential for revenue growth is immense. Exporting requires adherence to stringent quality and phytosanitary standards, and the GDC has implemented training and support programs to ensure growers meet these criteria. The GDC, being a company within the CGA group, can also draw on the expertise and resources of the broader CGA, which includes world-class experts on plant health, cultivars, and pests and diseases. The GDC offers interventions that give growers the skills, resources, and infrastructure needed to thrive in this competitive sector.

While exports remain a key focus, the local market offers significant opportunities for growth as well. The GDC can assist growers to also supply high-quality fruit to the local retail and processing sectors.

This past year saw high local juicing prices, offering some black growers a welcome boost. Upward shifts in juice prices and also shifts in export prices toward the end of the season, were markedly sharp this past season, illustrating why responsiveness and access to good information is necessary to achieve profitability.

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While the short-term profits of juicing can be tantalising, a long-term view to develop a diversified market strategy that includes exporting will ensure sustainable futures for our growers. For example, planning to export requires growers to incorporate the necessary plant health and pest control measures as needed by specific markets. These must be in place over many years to fully reap the rewards of exporting citrus to the EU, for example, and growers are best to keep their options open to whatever future market conditions will give them the best income.

Transitioning black citrus farmers from startup or small-scale operations to commercially viable enterprises is central to the GDC's mission. The GDC fosters partnerships with established commercial growers, creating mentorship opportunities that bridge the knowledge gap and facilitate the transfer of best practices.

To ensure long-term success, the GDC supports black growers in accessing high-quality inputs such as disease-free planting stock, fertilizers, and irrigation systems. These interventions are geared toward boosting productivity and enhancing the competitiveness of black citrus growers in the market.

In line with the GNU principles of inclusive agricultural job creation, the citrus industry's transformation has a direct impact on rural employment. By fostering the growth of black growers, the sector can generate thousands of jobs across the value chain, from farm labour to logistics and processing. This aligns with the broader goal of reducing unemployment and promoting rural development.

Despite progress, challenges such as access to land, water rights, and financing remain barriers to full participation. However, the GDC is addressing these through advocacy and partnerships with government and financial institutions. Initiatives such as infrastructure investment and the development of irrigation schemes are also key to unlocking growth.

The future of black citrus growers in South Africa is one of opportunity and transformation. With sustained support from the GDC and other stakeholders, these growers are poised to play a significant role in the citrus industry, driving economic growth, job creation, and empowerment for years to come.





NEW CULTIVARS HOLD LIMITLESS POTENTIAL

The South African citrus industry is excited about a groundbreaking moment with the discovery of a potential new cultivar on Konzi Farm, located 23 kilometres from Fort Beaufort. This marks the first-ever discovery of this nature by a member of the Grower Development Company (GDC), paving the way for new possibilities in the citrus market.

This development stems from a spontaneous mutation on a navel orange tree.

The discovery was made by Eric Nohamba, a visionary farmer whose curiosity led to this remarkable find. Eric sadly passed away recently, as reported in our previous newsletter, but his legacy lives on through his children, who now run Konzi Farm with pride and determination. For the Nohamba family, this cultivar represents more than just an economic opportunity — it is a potential tribute to their father's passion, one that will carry his memory forward into the future.

Eric found a branch with unusual fruit in one of his orchards. He noticed these oranges had pink pigmentation in the rind, and the inside flesh was red. It has a normal taste profile and early suggestions are that its seasonal timing holds further commercial advantages.

"When my father called me about the discovery, I was over the moon. He saw this funny-looking navel and then inside it was blushing, blushing red," explains Kuhle Nohamba, Eric's son. "We would like for his name not to vanish. He was a hard-working citrus grower, and we want to see his legacy expand."

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Kuhle Nohamba



Eric Nohamba





Soon after the discover, Eric informed Jon Roberts from the CGA's Cultivar Company of the find, and this initiated a process of research and analysis. While the cultivar is still undergoing rigorous assessment, its discovery underscores the importance of vigilance and innovation in the citrus industry. Growers across South Africa are encouraged to look closely at their orchards — every unique mutation could hold the potential to revolutionise the market.

"These spontaneous mutations do happen sometimes, and some are off-type and some are true-to-type. It takes time to find out," says Roberts. "It is important that growers are aware of these sorts of discoveries." The new cultivar has already generated immense interest, not just for its commercial potential but also for its possible unique health benefits.

While the process of evaluating whether this new cultivar is commercially viable will take time – up to three years – the early signs are hopeful.

The discovery at Konzi Farm is more than just a scientific curiosity – it is a reminder of the transformative power of innovation in agriculture. For the Nohamba family, it represents an opportunity to honour their father's vision while contributing something unique to the global citrus industry.

The CGA and GDC are proud to support growers in their efforts to drive innovation. While Konzi Farm's new cultivar is still in its early stages, it stands as a beacon of what is possible when curiosity meets determination.



REPORTING A NEW DISCOVERY

The process of identifying and developing a new cultivar involves several steps. Here's how you can contribute to the next big breakthrough:

1. **Mark and Report:** Spot a mutation? Clearly mark the tree or branch but avoid picking the fruit. Encourage farm workers to report anomalies by offering rewards for their vigilance. Examples of mutations include colour changes, earlier or later ripening, or unusual fruit sizes and textures.
2. **Evaluate Stability:** Monitor the fruit over several harvests to assess stability.
3. **Submit for Shoot-Tip Grafting:** Once the mutation shows stability and commercial potential, the next step is to submit budwood for pathogen cleansing. This ensures the plant material is free from graft-transmissible diseases.
4. **Register for Plant Breeder's Rights:** If the mutation is distinguishable and commercially viable, register it as a new cultivar. These steps ensure that new discoveries are properly managed and protected, setting the stage for successful commercialisation.



CITRUS TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

In 2019 the Economic Transformation of Black Citrus Growers (ETBCG) Programme was launched by the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), in partnership with the Jobs Fund, the Land Bank, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, AgriSETA, the LIMA Rural Development Foundation and FNB. A significant part of the programme comprised of training to ensure that new and existing employees of beneficiaries can develop their knowledge and further their careers.

The GDC was the implementation partner for the enterprise development part of the programme, while the CGA's Citrus Academy was the implementation partner for skills development. The Academy and the GDC regularly work closely together to keep the citrus industry on its transformational course.

The GDC took part in a gathering of role-players in the ETBCG on 14 November in Irene, Pretoria. The goal was to take stock, and then to look towards the future.

Jacomien de Klerk, General Manager of the Citrus Academy, led discussions on the achievements of the programme. "One can ask: how much and how many? And the answers to the question prove how a small group of passionate people had a huge impact," De Klerk said while detailing the figures of the initiative.

R12.9 million rand was channeled into 28 different skills programmes, changing the lives of 1 039 participants. One figure that stands out as well is the pages of learning material that was printed - no less than 387 067. This formed the basis of knowledge transfers in areas such as plant production, business administration, and packhouse work.





The initiative had a wide footprint, with 11 delivery sites, including Thohoyandou, Nkweleni, the Sundays River Valley and Citrusdal.

The training kicked off in early 2020 and its initial roll-out was complicated by the national Covid-19 response measures. At the recent gathering in Pretoria, many of the delegates noted how running the programme during Covid was a challenge, but one that showed how adaptive and resilient the people in the citrus industry can be. New plans were made, and methods of learning changed, without sacrificing training quality.

During the discussions, it also became clear how important enterprise development is for rural development in general. Often emphasis is placed on infrastructure, the availability of land, market access, or logistics, while business skills and enterprise strategy do not receive much attention. What the ETBCG Programme's educational component has shown, however, is that knowledge and know-how is essential to the transformation of agricultural sectors. Without knowing how to run a profitable enterprise in these fast-changing and challenging times, the economic contribution growing citrus enterprises can make to rural communities remain limited.



Another topic of discussion was the importance of recruiting. Thanks to great relationships with growers and the local communities in their areas, the right candidates for the right courses were identified - making sure lives were changed. Three black growers were especially instrumental in the recruitment process. Segomotso Letebele and Louisa Maloka-Mogotsi, both pioneering citrus farmers from the North West, and Khaya Katoo, from the Eastern Cape.

It became clear from the feedback by the delegates that there is a hunger for knowledge and self-improvement in many communities, and this is why more initiatives such as the ETBCG's skills component are necessary.

Building out and deepening the offering of the ETBCG skills component in potential future initiatives would create immense opportunities of improvement, not just for those who seek education, but also for the citrus industry at large.



CGA Citrus Summit

In March next year, the citrus industry will gather for the Citrus Summit of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA). This gathering, held every two years, is a significant event not just in the fruit industry, but in South African agriculture. It gathers role-players from all sectors - the growers themselves, government stakeholders, role-players further down the value chain, and exciting speakers who can give insight into the challenges and opportunities agriculture is facing at this moment.

The theme for next year's gathering is "Tough times don't last, tough people do". This adage was so powerfully quoted by former Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, at the CGA's 2023 Citrus Summit.

Finding solutions together while making sure the industry is as robust as it can be, are at the centre of gatherings such as the Citrus Summit. It creates a platform for the citrus growers of southern Africa to discuss matters of common interest and find sustainable answers to the challenges facing the industry, all in collaboration with our partners from government and other parts of the value chain.

It also presents an opportunity for growers to meet and interact with staff from the range of CGA group of companies.

Events such as the Citrus Summit are essential. It fosters connection and understanding. It offers wisdom and opportunities. It is also a moment of stocktaking: where are we and how can we all move forward together?

The citrus industry is experiencing an immense moment of opportunity. We can grow tremendously, if all stakeholders come together. Our Vision 260 encapsulates this: it is possible to export 160 million 25kg cartons of citrus by 2032, and thereby creating an additional 100 000 jobs.

The summit provides one space in which we can physically come together, talk, connect and attempt to put an end to the tough times and challenges faced by many, so that the tough people can thrive.

**The 5th CGA Citrus Summit
11-13 March 2025
The Boardwalk Hotel,
Summerstrand, Gqeberha**





**The GDC wishes all
its citrus growers
and their workers a
happy Christmas and
a peaceful time of
rest over the festive
season.**

