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South African citrus industry optimistic about its future

Citrus has been grown in South Africa for a very long time. According to records, the first citrus exported from South Africa was in 1906. The industry is built on solid foundations of research, variety development, plantation investment and the passion of citrus farmers. The whole citrus ecosystem is focused on the markets that South Africa supply to.

This is how PMA South Africa's country manager, Lianne Jones, summarised the input of citrus experts in PMA SA's broadcast in partnership with Beanstalk.Global, on 24 June 2021. The panel of speakers included Prof. Vaughan Hattingh at Citrus Research International (CRI), Jon Roberts at CGA Cultivar Company, Duo Landman at Landman Group, Rowan Vickery at FruitOne and Joe Shaw Roberts at KANTAR.

Currently, throughout South Africa 96,000 hectares are planted under citrus. Production is estimated to increase from 160 million tons in 2021 to 200 million tons in the next five years and up to 260 million tons in the next ten years. These figures are based on trees currently in the ground, said Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association (CGA), in a pre-interview to the broadcast.

South Africa, the world's second largest exporter of fresh citrus after Spain, exported a record 146 million cartons of citrus, including oranges, lemons and grapefruits in 2020, with European markets the biggest recipients of the fruit. The other counter-seasonal regions exported to are Asia, the Middle East and North America.

Chadwick said the industry expects to log another record year this year with shipments of around 160 million 15kg equivalent cartons, and forecasts growth at 10 million cartons per year for the next decade.

"Citrus Research International (CRI) aims to sustain global competitiveness of the South African citrus industry through providing research and technical support services. One of the overarching priorities of research efforts in Southern Africa is to ensure that we gain, retain and optimise conditions for market access. To remain competitive, you need to remain in the forefront of technology," said Hattingh.

"Research is not only high-tech scientific work but also research that relates to consumers, such as how we change the profile of citrus that it becomes more attractive and respond to market demands and consumer expectations. That in itself creates a profile for citrus fruits that is perfectly aligned with consumers' interest in minimising environmental impact. South Africa has always succeeded in remaining in touch with what the markets want from them."

“Citrus Growers Association Cultivar Company, (CGACC), owned by the CGA, was established in 2012 to provide South African citrus growers an alternative access to both open and protected cultivars on reasonable terms and conditions, protecting the rights of growers and breeders in the cultivars space in South Africa. The aim is to assist our growers to remain competitive internationally” said Roberts.

“We are aiming to achieve a spread across the season, flattening production peaks, with the cultivars we are procuring, ensuring season fresh fruit.”

Roberts believes although the demand for soft citrus increased over the last ten years, the Covid pandemic may have caused a reverse trend based on the consumers reduced trips to the supermarket, where they sought to buy fruit with better shelf life, and health attributes such as Hard Citrus varieties Oranges and Lemons. It will be interesting to see how long this trend is sustained.

Watch the broadcast here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0ZMYcAOge0>

About Produce Marketing Association

Produce Marketing Association (PMA) is the leading trade association representing companies from every segment of the global produce and floral supply chain. PMA helps members grow by providing connections that expand business opportunities and increase sales and consumption. PMA has a unique network of more than 53,000 member contacts from more than 2,900 member companies, which are based in 54 countries across six continents. These contacts span all sizes and types of businesses across the supply chain. For more information, visit www.pma.com

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