

THE LAST WORD

PIET SMIT is the Managing Director of the Komati Fruit Group, SA's largest privately owned grower and exporter of citrus and subtropical fruit.

He is also currently the Chairman of Citrus Research international (CRI), the research and technical services organisation that serves the SA (and international) citrus industry. LOUISE BRODIE reports.



How did you become involved in the citrus industry?

"Although I grew up on a farm in the Gravelotte area of Limpopo near Letsitele, my official introduction to the citrus industry happened quite late in my adult life. I had qualified as a lawyer and had built a career in the legal profession in Pretoria. Then my father-in-law, Milaan Thalwitzer asked me to join his rapidly expanding farming business, Bosveld Sitrus, which I joined in 1998. We were both directors, and managed all aspects of the business such as production, marketing, packing, finances and personnel management. I learned rapidly about the citrus industry in a practical, hands-on way. Over the past 20 years the company has grown exponentially and has been rebranded as the Komati Fruit Group."

In addition to your responsibilities at Komati Fruit, you have been serving as the Chairman of CRI since 2018. What are the other industry and community bodies on which you serve, and what motivates your involvement with these organisations?

"I serve on the boards of Houers Koöperatief (Chairman), Granor Passi (Pty) Ltd, Zest Group Holdings (Pty) Ltd (Chairman), the Letaba Water Users Association, N&N Canal Board (Chairman), Lowveld Academy Group Holdings (two private secondary schools in which Komati Group has a 50% share) and the Governing Body of Hoërskool Ben Vorster.

"All over the world the backbone of agriculture is the family farming business and as leading farmers in our field of fruit production, we also need to lead within our industry and in our local communities. Organised agriculture and production regions are only as successful as the people who steer and support them. Our business is situated in rural

farming communities and, like the effective functioning of local producer organisations, irrigation boards and broader industry organisations have a direct impact on agricultural businesses and rural communities. Therefore, it's important to contribute to the management of these organisations."

The research and technical services of CRI provide crucial support to the rapidly expanding South and Southern African citrus industry. Please share your comments in this regard.

"The citrus industry's production volumes have nearly doubled over the past 10 years. As global competitors in the market place, SA citrus exporters face keen competition from other fruit producing countries. The industry is a huge creator of employment in SA and the foreign revenue that the industry earns annually makes a significant contribution to the country's foreign earnings. The role of the CRI in supporting this booming industry has been fundamental to its success due to the range of well-established, critical services that it provides.

"During a period of rapid expansion, the high demand for plant material creates an increased risk of the introduction of inferior or diseased material. Citrus diseases have potentially devastating effects on the industry, as in other parts of the world, which highlights the invaluable contribution made by the CRI to the biosecurity of our industry. The CRI's Citrus Foundation Block is therefore an invaluable resource to our industry, as it provides top genetic quality citrus plant material that is free from any harmful pathogens to the citrus industry. This ensures a disease-free supply of plant material, which establishes the citrus industry as a leader in its field when compared to other SA fruit industries.

"The CRI's extension services are also vital to the support of this rapidly growing industry and the organisation's established international network of research contacts and collaborations with international institutions ensure that the SA citrus industry remains in the forefront of international research.

"The CRI further plays a pivotal role in retaining lucrative markets and opening new ones to the industry. Many years of visionary research on issues such as CBS and FCM has enabled the industry to avert huge risks that could have been imposed by the unreasonable EU requirements in this regard. Through its agility, CRI is also able to address urgent risks such as the potential closing of the Japanese market due to new fruit fly requirements, which was imminent in 2018."

What are your thoughts about the future of the SA citrus industry?

"Despite the existing political and economic challenges, I am positive about the SA fruit industry. We, as growers have excellent support structures serving our industry, with great opportunities ahead. We have a world-class industry and product with an excellent reputation, which will continue to be of great value to our country.

"Our challenge is to retain and even expand our market share. This will require more discipline on the marketing side of the industry, and an even stronger research capacity to support the growth of the industry."

Nexus^{AG} vestig berokingseenheid om grondberoking te verhewe

ADVERTORIAL

Die herhaalde of langdurige verbouing van gewasse op dieselfde stuk grond, laat patogeniese swamme en aalwurms opbou en veroorsaak herplantsiekte. Dit lei tot jong bome se swak verpotte groei én dus laer opbrengste. Grondberoking is die aangewese behandeling en behels grond-disinfeksie.

Verskeie praktyke teen herplantsiekte word gebruik, waaronder gewas-rotasie en biologiese praktyke soos bio-beroking, solarisasie of anaerobiese disinfeksie. Gewas-rotasie op meerjarige gewasse of die ontbossing van natuurlike veld is egter nie altyd moontlik nie en hoewel sommige hiervan effektief is, is implementering uitdagend en duur.

Chemiese grond-disinfeksie is die gewildste bestryding. Chemiese produkte wat teen lae temperature verdamp, word gebruik en

word as 'n vloeistof toegedien. Dit verander in 'n gas, wat deur die grond beweeg.

Agrocelone NE word wêreldwyd as 'n hoogs-effektiewe beroking-middel beskou, en gee betroubare resultate. Agrocelone NE, of soortgelyke middels, het egter nie metielbromied - nie in Suid-Afrika beskikbaar - se penetrasievermoë nie. Noukeurige toediening deur trekker-ondersteunende implemente en pompe, wat die produk teen die regte dosis by die teiken-area kry, is nodig.

Agrocelone NE se unieke EC-formulasie maak ook drupbesproeiing moontlik, wat trekker-gebruik uitskakel en dus kostes verlaag. Hierdie toediening verseker ook optimale grond-gas-verspreiding.

Nexus^{AG}, in samewerking met AQL in Spanje, het 'n berokingseenheid gevestig om grondberoking in Suid-Afrika na die volgende vlak te neem; en in hoë kwaliteit hulp-apparate belê, waaronder GPS-aangedrewe trekkers, hoë tegnologie vloeimeters en sensors, wat o.a. verstopings rapporteer. Nexus^{AG} kan onder meer kernvrugte, steenvrugte, aarbeie, sitrus, groente en tafeldruiwe in die hoof produksie-areas bedien.

Beroking geskied volgens 'n rooster en 'n berokingsertifikaat word na voltooiing uitgereik. Nexus^{AG}-landboukundiges kan ook raad verleen met die vestiging en bestuur van jong bome voor beroking, omdat behoorlike boord-vestiging krities is tot daardie boord se sukses.

Kontak ons gerus vir meer inligting: 021 860 8040

www.nexusag.net

