

CRI Postharvest Workshops 2026



Delegates at the Eastern Cape workshops

CRI successfully hosted its annual Citrus Postharvest Workshops at the beginning of this year. By **Vernon Jacobs**



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The annual regional citrus postharvest workshops wrapped up just as the industry was preparing for another harvest and packing season. The event drew strong participation from various industry stakeholders and positive feedback from citrus producers and pack house managers.

The workshops were held across the major citrus-growing regions of SA – Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern and Western Cape – bringing together various industry stakeholders. A panel of postharvest researchers and industry specialists shared insights on the latest developments and challenges facing the sector.

With the citrus industry continuing to expand, the 2026 workshops recorded more than 1 000 registrations, including producers, pack house managers and staff, exporters, and agrochemical representatives. Citrosol served as the main sponsor, supported by platinum, gold, silver, and bronze sponsors from across the agriculture sector.

The programme focused on improving pack house operations, protecting fruit quality, and strengthening the harvest-to-market value chain. Discussions also addressed broader industry challenges, ranging from road and logistics to practical topics like residue analysis and dust management.

Industry matters: logistics, markets and the road ahead

The opening session focused on the broader industry ecosystem that is shaping citrus production and exports. Regional representatives reflected on the 2025 packing season, sharing insights on production volumes, operational challenges, and regional performance. Citrosol followed with an overview of its latest product innovations and technical developments.

Preparing for 2026: economics and market access

As producers prepare for the 2026 season, rising input costs and stricter market standards remain key concerns. The discussion was centred around practical

steps for producers and pack houses to maintain export compliance, reduce rejections, and protect market access.

A message from the CGA

Logistics Division

The Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) of Southern Africa presented an update on industry logistics and long-term planning. A key focus was Vision260, representing the industry target of exporting more than 230 million cartons by 2032. Achieving this goal will predominantly depend on continued market diversification.

Encouraging progress was reported on improving logistics and infrastructure. Developments include the operational port of Maputo, renewed activity at the Durban Gateway Terminal, expanded citrus cold storage at Cato Ridge, and upgrades to Bayhead Road and the N2 and N3 highways.

However, electricity costs remain a major operational burden, while rail infrastructure continues to pose challenges. Greater collaboration between the citrus industry, government, and logistics stakeholders is required to strengthen transport systems and support future growth.

Improving pack house operations: precision, cleanliness and smarter thinking

The second session explored pack house operations and its role in protecting fruit quality.

Areas of discussion included drenching and chemical management, water quality, sanitation, equipment maintenance, and extending fruit shelf life. A CRI postharvest researcher introduced current research priorities, followed by practical insights from researchers and extension officers. An important focus of the overall message was that small operational improvements can deliver significant quality gains.

Drench management and chemical top-ups

Effective drench management depends on the correct use of active ingredients, proper mixing procedures, and rigorous water sanitation.

Researchers recommended careful monitoring of chemical top-ups, and development of accurate calibration curves for different citrus varieties. Regular water testing was also emphasised.

Sanitation

Every surface counts. Sanitation must extend beyond tanks and chemical treatments. Air, water, and surface hygiene help reduce pathogen loads and hinder resistance development. A structured sanitation programme can significantly reduce decay throughout the pack house.

This session also encouraged "innovative thinking" and following "Boerate" to find practical, cost-effective solutions that improve operational efficiency without sacrificing quality.

From pack house to market: protecting quality every step of the way

Day two shifted the focus from industry matters and pack house operations to post-harvest fruit handling and related practices. Presentations explored processes such as accurate yield estimation and maturity indexing, degreening, packaging, cooling protocols, and rind disorders observed during the season. The message was simple – precision at every stage protects profitability.

Degreening – back to basics

This citrus postharvest treatment received renewed attention, with experts emphasising the

importance of sticking to proven fundamentals. However, success begins long before degreening. Growers should remember that fruit colour at harvest affects degreening efficiency, early harvesting limits pigment development, and proper air management is essential as carbon dioxide competes with ethylene.

Packaging – small mistakes, big consequences

Discussions around packaging highlighted the importance of correct palletisation and the use of high-quality materials. Incorrect stacking, damaged pallets, or unsuitable pallet specifications for certain markets can lead to rejected consignments and potential financial losses. To mitigate these risks, CRI has revised its packaging guidelines for 2026.

Understanding rind disorders

The session concluded with a review of rind disorders observed during the previous season. Experts highlighted the need to distinguish between rind pitting, rind breakdown, and chilling injury, as each condition has different causes and management strategies.

Rethinking postharvest disease prevention and management

The final session addressed evolving approaches to postharvest disease management, with a growing focus on cleaner and more sustainable management strategies. Beyond chemical strategies to manage decay, experts unpacked critical topics including fair residue analysis, wastewater compliance under GlobalG.A.P. standards, as well as the often-overlooked role of dust, both in the orchard and inside the pack house.

The push toward "no-chem", "low-chem", and organic pack lines

With export markets – particularly the EU – tightening residue limits, alternative chemistries and non-chemical approaches are becoming increasingly important to manage postharvest diseases. Hence, the

industry is likely to see continued growth in low-chemical and organic pack lines.

Fair residue testing

This analysis depends on proper sampling. Residue distribution on fruit is rarely uniform and can be influenced by rind characteristics, pre-harvest spray timing, fruit maturity, and even how samples are handled before reaching the laboratory. Precision in this area safeguards market access and reduces costly surprises.

Dust – the hidden risk factor

Ongoing research aims to better understand the impact of dust on sanitation practices, fruit quality, and overall decay management. The goal is clear: identify effective strategies to minimise and suppress dust, strengthening hygiene standards across the value chain.

As the workshops concluded, one message stood out: growth demands precision. From orchard and pack house practices to logistics strategy, success in global markets will depend on collaboration, innovation, and disciplined execution. By aligning production and quality management, infrastructure and compliance, the citrus industry of SA is positioning itself for a competitive and sustainable future. ▮

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