



Vaughan Hattingh,
CEO of Citrus Research International

Citrus Packaging Forum A PRIORITY

CRI convened an industry packaging workshop in Paarl on 01 February, with the aim of taking under consideration the current technical status of packaging technologies utilised in the southern African citrus export industry, and identifying appropriate R&D needs and opportunities in the packaging environment. The workshop was chaired by Prof Vaughan Hattingh, CEO of CRI who provided the following comments on the background to calling for such a workshop and some of the salient outcomes arising from the workshop.

In the past the citrus industry benefited from thorough and coordinated research and development on the subject of packaging technology. There were many advantages to such a coordinated industry approach, including the assurance that the entire industry's product would be packaged in compatible formats and thereby provide for optimal management of fruit condition through the handling chain. Effective management of fruit condition in terms of packaging includes consideration of aspects such as cooling, gas exchange, moisture management and the appropriate physical containment. Another advantage of the coordinated industry approach to packaging in the past, was the ability to establish standards and monitor compliance with standardised packaging specifications and practices.

Since 1997 there has been considerable diversification in packaging formats used within the citrus industry and the coordination of the industry's approach to packaging has fallen away. Taking into consideration that packaging accounts for approximately 17% of costs, being considerably more than most producers' profit

margins, this reduced focus on packaging technology has serious potential implications for the industry's sustained competitiveness. Furthermore, the demands arising from increased volumes of citrus being exported to markets that require cold sterilisation and a dramatic increase in production, that has placed pressure on the ports' cooling facilities, have been compounded by the reduction in ventilation capability arising from compromised packaging compatibility.

Another major industry change that has taken place over the past 10 years, that has direct relevance for packaging technology, is the dramatic increase in the volume of citrus fruit exported in shipping containers. The workshop highlighted a lack of adequate research focused on determining the effects of this change on one's ability to manage fruit condition, as well as an evaluation of the compatibility of packaging formats with containerised shipping conditions.

The workshop identified a wide range of other technical packaging needs and opportunities, including many relevant research priorities. However, the single most significant recommendation arising from the workshop was that an industry packaging forum be established, with the following objectives. To provide a vehicle whereby industry standards and guidelines for packaging can be established and a platform from which monitoring of compliance with minimum packaging specifications can be monitored. CRI will consequently engage with relevant industry stakeholders to determine the most appropriate means of establishing and operating such a forum and ensure that it is implemented. For further information contact Vaughan Hattingh on tel. 021 882 8553.

The green planet of business

• Macfrut

International exhibition of equipment, technology and services for the production, processing, marketing and transport for fruit and vegetables;

• Trans World

Exhibition of agro-food transport

• Agro Bio Frut

Exhibition of new technologies and seed production;
Exhibition of organic production of the Mediterranean region.



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