As this edition of the journal goes to press, citrus growers across southern Africa are preparing for the harvesting season. There is much to look forward to in this season, and if all role players act responsibly, this could be a successful citrus campaign. It is time to reflect on some of the positive aspects of the forthcoming season. The market is finding itself short of quality citrus fruit as we enter the season - and if prices are kept realistic, sales volumes should be good. Greed at the beginning of the season may slow down sales rates with knock on negative outcomes later in the season. The window opened by inclement northern hemisphere weather is short-lived. As we get into our high volume export period only southern hemisphere fruit is in the market, and we compete against each other. Likewise, chasing early season prices with sub-standard fruit is fraught with dangers - the market will in all likelihood discount poor quality fruit, and later fruit will suffer from poor quality perceptions. With the correct export strategy, sales volumes and net returns should be good in 2005.

While reflecting on the positives, the factor that stands out most is the quality of the people that serve in the southern African fruit industries. Southern African farmers are a rare breed; independent, hard-working and fiercely proud of what they produce. They have overcome droughts, floods, currency fluctuations, regime changes and many other challenges while continuously providing top quality produce. Grower leaders had the foresight to secure the competencies that ensure continued access to their markets - funding from their own returns activities such as research, market access, transformation and information.

With years of experience, export agents have managed to introduce and market fruit to every corner of the globe. Understanding consumer requirements is their game, and they have mastered it over the years. As communication between agents has improved, so has their ability to supply markets with desired fruit at the correct time.

Service providers to the fruit industries are world-class. Researchers from South Africa are sought after speakers at international conferences, while they consult to growers across the globe. Transporters, cold stores and fruit terminals have proved reliable partners in delivering quality fruit into the market, while the quality assurance mark of the PPECB is recognised world-wide.

The role of government in all of this cannot be underplayed. Our plant health officials have built up relationships with their counterparts in major markets, which ensures the smooth flow of our fruit. As we enter new markets, so new relationships have to be developed. As we build relationships between our industries and government - common goals and objectives are identified with positive consequences. As a joint initiative, the Fruit Industry Plan gives us all guidance in future strategic direction.

As South Africans involved in the fruit industries we can be proud of what has been achieved, and we have much to build on for the future.

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