The wisdom of Abraham Lincoln

"You cannot strengthen the weak
by weakening the strong
You cannot help the small man
by tearing down the big man
You cannot help the poor
by destroying the rich
You cannot help the wage-earner
by pulling down the wage-payer
You cannot keep out of trouble
by spending more than your income
You cannot further the brotherhood
of man by inciting class hatred
You cannot establish security
on borrowed money
You cannot build character and courage
by taking away man’s initiative and independence
You cannot help men permanently
by doing for them what they should do for themselves"

Words spoken hundreds of years ago, and yet so appropriate in South Africa today. It is unfortunate that many who promote transformation see it as give and take, rather than empowering those with little to be able to earn more. Many see black economic empowerment as enriching some at the expense of others. As Abraham Lincoln wrote, the poor, weak, and the wage earners depend upon the rich, strong and wage payers. Every country has rich and poor, weak and strong and wage earners and wage payers - and they need each other to exist.

As a fruit industry we need to look at unique ways of growing our industries to the benefit of all those who depend upon it - growth and redistribution are both necessary to make this a better country. Recent press reports highlight the fact that South African businesses and government have become almost exclusively inward looking - captivated by meeting legislative requirements and righting wrongs of the past while ignoring what our competitors are doing. And the competitors are having a field day - identifying our weaknesses, building their strengths, and in the process growing their market share (at our expense). By the time we wake up we will be lagging behind the field. In order to ensure that growth happens we need to start strategising to remain competitive, if we don’t there will be nothing to redistribute in the future - and we will all be losers.

Local solutions to local problems - that is the key. Growers in some fruit growing regions have already initiated plans to meet transformation targets in their regions, they are not waiting to be told what to do or how to do it, they are just doing it. Doing it in consultation and partnership with local government, local communities and local workers. They will normalise the society in which they live and by so doing reduce the likelihood of farm invasions, violent crime and unemployment. They will be winners in the game. These communities will be examples that others will follow, leading to a better South Africa for all.

JUSTIN CHADWICK, CEO, CGA