Leadership

It is said that some people’s minds are like cement – thoroughly mixed and permanently set. On the other hand some people’s minds are like spring water – clear and fluid. During times of wholesale change it is leaders who belong to the second category that ensure appropriate direction in the industries they serve. If ever there was a time for strong, clear and adaptive leadership of the fruit industries it is now. Over the past two years the citrus industry has hit the lowest and highest points in the cyclical rollercoaster. 2005/6’s disaster was followed by a fair to good season in 2006/7. Those with fruit prospered well, while those with below average crops came out even (in general). There are a number of factors that contributed to this change in fortunes – probably the most significant being a decrease in volumes (both out of South Africa and out of the southern hemisphere in general), closer coordination in key markets (such as Japan), and a movement away from consignment sales. Where leadership comes into the equation is in planning for 2007/8 – it is important that we do not get lulled into complacency by one year’s reasonable returns. The challenges remain the same, and with a HUGE crop forecast for 2007/8 we need to ensure that basic disciplines are retained. Fruit quality remains a key factor – leaders need to ensure that the correct market related quality standards are promulgated, and that these standards are effectively policed.

An interesting phenomenon within the fruit industries is the devolution of decision making to the fruit type levels in some instances, and the converse in others. Within the citrus industry the formation of variety focus groups to represent the interests of navels, Valencia, lemons, grapefruit and soft citrus has resulted in more focus on variety specific issues. Similarly, within the deciduous industry the resourcing up of pome, stone and grape structures means more focus on fruit type specific issues. At the same time Fruit South Africa is redefining its role – as an umbrella organisation representing the interests of subtropical, deciduous and citrus. And the subtropical industries themselves are forming closer relationships with the emergence of the SA Subtropical Growers’ Association. It will be interesting to see how these structures develop, and how effectively they address industry issues.

On behalf of the SA Fruit Journal
I wish you all a happy and blessed Christmas, and all that you wish for in the new year. To industry leaders may the Christmas break be a time to rest and revitalize, so that you can guide the industry through the challenges of the new year.

"Leadership in this respect is about great responsibility (not power or money) but to affect change and allow everyone to express their potential.”

DEEPAK CHOPRA