

# Seedless Lemons Disappoint Growers

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At the first round of variety focus group meetings on 23 March this year the Lemon Focus Group representative from Western Cape expressed his concern about the situation with respect to seedless lemons in South Africa. In this meeting and subsequent meetings during the year members of the group gave feedback of their experiences. The representative in the Nelspruit area reported that seedless lemons had been taken out or were not being exported as yields were low and they flowered all the time. Pieter Nortje of the Sunday's River Valley added that as soon as the fruit gets yellow, it gets soft and drops. The representative from the Senwes area said that they had pulled out all their trees three years ago due to problems with endoxerosis, poor yields and timing whilst the growers' representative for Hoedspruit said that they had a similar experience. Further discussion around the point of procuring patented cultivars touched on the following points:

- Growers buying new, patented cultivars take a risk the same as the purchase of any new product.
- The non performance of a patented cultivar is an issue between the buyer and seller.
- Continuing to promote a product once it has been shown to be risky amounted to false advertising.
- The industry must keep growers informed if it appears that a product is risky.

The publication, Landbouweekblad picked up on this item and published an article in their 12 November issue, parts of which have been translated below with their permission.

The world's first seedless lemons developed in South Africa are not meeting expectations according to farmers in the Sunday's River Valley. The question is whether all new citrus cultivars which command royalties are adequately tested before they are released commercially. Seedless fruit is mostly sought after in Western countries where it attracts premium prices. Thus it was with some excitement that Mr. Pieter Nortje of the farm Sitrusrand in Kirkwood became aware that the world's first seedless lemons known by the trade name Eureka! SL and established in 1998 by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) had been selected and made available for commercial use at the Musina experiment farm. From his previous experience with the seedless Valencia cultivar, Delta and with late mandarins, he realized that his risks would be greater because seedless types are generally more harvest sensitive, but with good orchard management good returns could be achieved. "The question every farmer must ask is whether the expected premium will compensate for the smaller yield. With most new citrus cultivars, you must rely on the specifications as presented to you by the distributors. There are no established areas where the history of the relevant cultivars can be researched. If a farmer complains later when the cultivar has not performed, then the plant breeders' argument

is that if you hit the jackpot you as farmer would have realized the benefits. On the other hand the farmer expects that, because he has paid royalties the cultivar will fulfill the specifications. In contrast to the days when there were strict state directives and it took years before new cultivars became available in the trade, the emergence of plant breeder ownership in the last decade has evolved into a money-making scheme". He felt that the release form that the farmer signs puts him in a position where he has little chance of instituting claims against the distributors.

In 2004 he established three hectares of Eureka! SL. Before the trees were in full production he noted that the fruit tended to drop quickly. He initially thought that it was because the trees were young but the following year they still did not yield well in spite of good flowering. In the first three years about seven percent of his trees died of root rot. As a precaution he placed the drippers further from the tree stems and applied several phosphate sprays which restricted losses to some extent. He noted that although this treatment helped to achieve seventy percent of the normal harvest, these additional practices were not required on his other orchards. What disappoints him is that he has received no premium for seedless lemons. In addition the fruit has to be harvested as quickly as possible because it does not last as well on the tree and in contrast to normal lemons which give three flushes, the seedless cultivar only gives one, between March and May. He added that the shelf life is also disappointing.

Mr. Charl du Plessis, marketing manager of Sunday's River Citrus Company (SRCC) in Addo agrees that it has become fashionable to make a variety of new cultivars and selections available because growers and agents want to offer something special in the variety of their offering to retailers. He thinks the frustration that farmers are experiencing is a symptom of the powerful position certain role players inherited from the past. He said that cultivar development is not cheap and requires large volumes to become commercially successful and only a small percentage of the new cultivars are really successful. He feels that growers should be protected by some type of ombudsman or they should form a grouping amongst themselves to ensure greater competition in the market. Those that receive royalties from



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# Transformation in progress in the Citrus Industry

Organising emerging growers in the Citrus Industry is one of the core activities within the Transformation Portfolio in CGA.

Recently Limpopo province, followed by the Eastern Cape, formed their own study groups and technical committees that will provide support to the emerging growers within the Industry.

The Transformation Administrator recently visited Mpumalanga, the purpose of the visit being to try to get the growers organised and also to have the growers represented in the Citrus Growers Development Chamber. Up until now Mpumalanga has not been properly represented in the CGDC. The second area, the Eastern Cape, was also visited to see if any of the projects there require any assistance from the Provincial Government, and also to visit the Provincial Department of Agriculture.

The visit by the CGA Transformation Administrator (Lukhanyo Nkombisa), the extension personnel from CRI (Andrew Mbedzi) and the mentor in the area (Bruce Andrews) was successful in the two projects that were visited (Champagne and Sibonelo).

## Champagne Farm meeting with the beneficiaries

The beneficiaries explained all the promised intentions for development of the project by the Department of Agriculture in Mpumalanga. The Department promised the beneficiaries that they will be doing infrastructure in the farm, from fencing, irrigation renovation of the houses and re-planting citrus trees in the projects.

The beneficiaries also highlighted the fact that they are still happy with their representative in the CGDC (Mr. Richman Mavimbele) who is the farm manager, and Mr. Philemon Sambu one of the beneficiaries for the time being until everything gets sorted within the governance of the beneficiaries.

## Sibonelo Farm meeting with the beneficiaries

This meeting between the beneficiaries, transformation administrator, extension officer from CRI and their mentor, and they explained to us the difficulties that they are experiencing with the Provincial Department of Agriculture in terms of the support they have been requesting. To date they have never received any support from the government's CASP grants. They requested that the transformation administrator engage with the province on their behalf. With regard to their representative in the CGDC they have appointed Ms. Susan Shabangu and Ms. Sarah Mabusa. The board members of the projects who attended the meeting also highlighted the fact that the projects are faced with some misunderstandings with regard to the operations of the projects.

## Meeting with the officials from the Provincial Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries

After the meetings with the beneficiaries from the two projects, the transformation administrator, the extension officer from CRI

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15 the cultivars which have their trademark should contribute to the market development of the respective cultivars. *The original article in its entirety can be viewed on [www.cga.co.za](http://www.cga.co.za) > what's new*

*The table below supplied by the Citrus Foundation Block shows the sale of lemon bud-wood since 2002 indicating a big increase in sales since 2008 which will translate into a significant increase in lemon production in a few years.*



Variety	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 #	Total
Eureka	27,700	117,450	116,350	67,120	51,480	66,750	113,840	207,455	331,856	1,100,001
Eureka SL	41,500	78,910	59,432	13,800	5,300	16,100	9,700	33,705	8,124	266,571
Genoa		21,180	17,900	12,460	6,100	5,500	1,500	5,000	92,130	161,770
Limoneira 8A		30,400	21,360	21,500	7,900	4,400	19,640	26,945	30,670	162,815
Lisbon						1,000	2,900	22,050	58,600	84,550
Lisbon YB		12,200	29,280	5,600	1,600		600	1,000		50,280
Fino				500						500
Elongated Eureka							60	10	30	100
2PH Eureka Seedless							60	10	10	80
Triploid					12	20		10	10	52
Femminello								50		50
Chaparro								40		40
Messina								20		20
	69,200	260,140	244,322	120,980	72,392	93,770	148,300	296,295	521,430	1,826,829