Vaughan Hattingh is the CEO for Citrus Research International (CRI). The South African Fruit Journal caught up with him and asked him the following questions.

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Your position with CRI certainly sounds challenging. What does it entail?
In trying to answer that I suppose it is first necessary to provide a sense of the scope of CRI’s business. Considering the southern African citrus industry’s position as the second largest global exporter of fresh citrus fruit, in combination with the distant positioning of the industry’s markets, it is not surprising that this is an industry that attaches high value to Research and Technical support. Against this background, with CRI’s mission being to maximise the industry’s global competitiveness through the coordination and provision of Research and Technical support services, the job comes with rather high long-term expectations and requires a good dose of strategic planning. The breadth of CRI’s operations is reflected in its operational structuring, consisting of the following divisions: Research and Technical; Technology Transfer; the Citrus Improvement Scheme and Cultivar Development, all with the over-arching priority of Market Access. Consequently there is also a high demand on ongoing, day-to-day operational management, over a varied range of activities, meaning that you have to both stay on your toes and keep on track with the long term strategic objectives. CRI additionally takes various technologies arising from research to commercialisation through licensing to both industry-owned and independent companies, bringing an exciting additional dimension to the job. Overall, it means that the job spans a wide range of issues with both a short and long term focus. I am in the privileged position of being able to describe my job as perennially stimulating, abundantly challenging and mostly enjoyable.

What is your background (briefly) and how did you become involved with CRI?
I have been involved in the citrus industry throughout my professional career. I was originally recruited to the industry in 1984 by Ian Moore, through the Outspan Bursary Scheme and have been captivated by the industry ever since. I studied in the direction of Entomology and Plant Pathology at UNISA, University of Pretoria, Stellenbosch University and University of KZN Pietermaritzburg, where I eventually obtained a PhD in Entomology. Nelspruit was my next port of call for about 10 years, mostly as a research entomologist. Towards the end of this term the industry went into deregulation and I became involved in management, through the process of securing the industry’s future Research and Technical support with the formation of CRI in 2001. I later moved back down to the Cape, where my office is hosted by Stellenbosch University, being one of the CRI Group Alliance Partner organisations.

How has this position impacted on your family and your lifestyle?
I have learned (unfortunately it was not a quick process) to find a balance. The job can consume you if you do not maintain control. I am fortunate to have been able to build a working environment that is stimulating, challenging, rewarding and to be able to combine this with good quality of life. The opportunity for a satisfying personal life is in my mind integral to maintaining a successful working environment.

Do you have any message for the readers out there?
The citrus industry has always inspired me. There remain huge challenges ahead, but I am very confident that the exemplary foresight that the citrus industry has historically demonstrated will enable it to prevail and continue flourishing into the future.