THE CITRUS FOUNDATION BLOCK celebrates 30 years: 1980 - 2010

The CIS was established in 1973 as a joint project between the South African Co-op Citrus Exchange and the Citrus and Subtropical Fruit Research Institute (CSFRI). During the “interim phase”, certified budwood was obtained from trees of various varieties that were selected in commercial orchards. These trees were tested for Citrus exocortis and if shown negative, they were registered as mother trees. Nurseries received material from these trees for multiplication. In 1977, shoot-tip grafting was introduced at the CSFRI in order to provide a virus-free source of budwood material. For protection, all varieties, except lemons and rootstocks, are pre-immunized with a mild strain of Citrus tristeza virus (CTV).

In 1980 the farm, Buffelsfontein, situated in Kruisrivier in the Uitenhage district was purchased by the South African Co-op Citrus Exchange to establish the Outspan Foundation Block (OFB) for the multiplication, evaluation and distribution of propagation material to the citrus industry. The premises had to comply with the following criteria: it should be located in an area where citrus would do well but where no citrus was previously cultivated, it should not be near a commercial citrus area, it should have fertile soil and a primary source of water and it should be close to an airport for the distribution of budwood. The premises chosen complied with all of the above requirements. Our first challenge was to clear the farm of old redundant vehicles and sheep pens and commence with constructing dwellings and an office. Soil analyses were done and six hectares of land was planted out to orchards. The soil was deeply ploughed and windbreaks were planted in preparation of the first mother trees. Nurseries were established. The mother trees in the open ground were increased in 1999 to 4 761.60 m². During the past 10 years an average of 2,3 million buds were erected to be able to meet this demand. However, the rising demand required us to erect another two identical shade-houses. It was not long before this space was inadequate and it was decided that open ground blocks with spacing of 1.5 m by 4.5 m should be utilised. This allowed us to adequately meet the demand of commercial varieties. The virologists had their reservations regarding this method of multiplication as the phytosanitary status of the increase trees planted in the open ground could not be guaranteed in the long run. As a preventative measure for the control of CTV, Citrus Greening and Citrus Black Spot, the plant pathologists and entomologist recommended that all multiplication should be done in insect and water controlled greenhouses. The first greenhouse of 1 894.40 m² was erected in 1997 and was increased in 1999 to 4 761.60 m² where new mother and increase trees were established. The mother trees in the open ground were thereafter only used for evaluations. Green house two, measuring 4 099.20 m², was erected in 2004 and was increased to 6 250 m² in 2006. In 2008, greenhouse three, measuring 2 016 m², was erected and another identical greenhouse was erected in 2010. The area at the CFB currently under insect and water controlled structures measures 15 043.20 m², in which 100 000 increase and 350 mother trees are established. The planning of a fifth greenhouse measuring 3 808 m² is now underway and all the non-functional open ground increase and evaluation trees have been removed.

The Outspan Foundation Block (OFB) was initially operated by the South African Co-op Citrus Exchange and thereafter by Outspan International and Capespan, before being transferred to CRI in 2002, whereafter it became known as the Citrus Foundation Block (CFB). The CFB is operated as part of the Citrus Improvement Scheme (CIS). The Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa is responsible for the CIS and has tasked CRI to operate the CIS, which it does with the advice of the CIS Advisory Committee comprising representation from a wide range of parties with an interest in the CIS.

In 1985, 241 000 buds were commercially supplied and in 1997 the number of buds supplied reached a record high of 5.3 million. During the past 10 years an average of 2.3 million buds were supplied annually. Once all local seed demand has been met, all excess seed is exported. This revenue is used for improvement and maintenance of the greenhouse and other infrastructure. The CFB aims to be self-sufficient and not profitable.

It is not possible to name each person who played an important role in the past 30 years. This was and always will be a team effort and we therefore wish to thank everyone involved.

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