International symposium on lychee, longan and other sapindaceae fruits

The 4th International Symposium on Lychee, Longan and Other Sapindaceae Fruits was held in White River, South Africa, from 2 to 6 December 2012. The symposium was jointly organised by the South African Litchi Growers’ Association (SALGA) and the Agricultural Research Council’s Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops (ARC-ITSC) under the auspices of ISHS. The Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Administration (DARDLA) and various other sponsors from their industry are thanked for their great financial support of the symposium. The symposium was attended by 150 delegates from South Africa, China, Thailand, India, Israel, Australia, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Egypt, Germany and New Zealand. Four keynote presentations, 40 oral and 40 poster presentations were delivered. Presentations and poster viewing were spread over four days, interspersed with a mid-symposium technical tour.

Regina Cronje
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH COUNCIL – INSTITUTE FOR TROPICAL AND SUBTROPICAL CROPS

At the opening ceremony Mr. Gavin Hardy, Chairman of SALGA, Mr. Derek Donkin, Convenor of the symposium, and Ms. Candith Mashego-Dlamini, MEC of DARDLA, welcomed the delegates. Prof. Sisir Mitra, Chairman of the ISHS Tropical and Subtropical Fruits Section, presented a summary of ISHS activities, its members as well as an outline of upcoming symposia and Acta Horticulturae. Prof. Errol Hewett, ISHS Board member from Massey University, New Zealand, gave a presentation about the importance and value of horticulture across the world, based on the ISHS publication “Harvesting the Sun”. Each morning session started with keynote addresses by eminent scientists on topical issues facing the global litchi industry. Keynote speakers included Prof. Houbin Chen and Prof. Xuming Huang, both from the South China Agricultural University (SCAU) in Guangzhou, China, giving an overview of world litchi production with specific reference to China’s litchi industry and research programmes, and an overview of physiological aspects relating to litchi production and strategies to improve litchi production, respectively. Prof. Sisir Mitra from BCKV University, India, and Dr. Schalk Schoeman from the ARC-ITSC presented overviews of litchi postharvest treatments and control strategies for stink bugs and moths in litchi, respectively.

During the symposium, presenters reported on recent advances and the most interesting topics relating to world production, marketing and technology transfer, cultural practices and crop physiology, postharvest management, pest and disease control as well as germplasm and breeding of litchi and longan. Although litchi and longan, the two biggest commercial crops in the Sapindaceae family, are rather small crops compared with deciduous fruit, they have great importance in the Asian regions, where 95% of the world litchi crop is produced. The world litchi industry, for example, has expanded rapidly in the past 20 years because of increasing interest in exotic fruit in Europe and increasing wealth in Asia, which in turn have provided lucrative returns to growers. Most industries are based on only one or two major cultivars, which limit their production season. Lack of technology innovation and research as well as high labour costs further limit these industries. The presentations at the symposium focused on research towards mitigating these challenges.

The influence of climate change on litchi and longan production and fruit quality and possible changes in orchard management to adjust to climate change, were discussed. Various papers also highlighted the importance of good fertilisation, organic nutrient management and irrigation practices for sustainable production. Good overviews of various orchard management practices to improve litchi production over a wide range of cultivars in different countries were presented. Such practices included the use of plant growth regulators, mulching, pruning practices and orchard mechanisation. Research papers on the use of sulphur treatments to extend postharvest shelf-life as well as alternatives to sulphur, including coatings, different packaging and hydro-cooling to maintain fruit quality, as well as drying techniques for both litchi and longan fruit, were discussed. Besides chemical and organic control strategies for pests and diseases, the role of breeding efforts and the use of genetic markers for improved cultivars.
that extend the harvesting season were discussed.

During the poster viewing session ample opportunity was given for all delegates to further discuss research work and interact. An introduction to the cultivar display at the entrance to the symposium venue gave insight into the litchi germplasm available in South Africa.

Apart from scientific reports and discussions, the delegates had the opportunity to learn about the South African litchi orchard and nursery practices as well as pack house technology and treatments during the mid-symposium tour.

At the gala dinner awards for best oral and poster presentations were presented. Several of our own researchers and a Subtrop extension officer were awarded for their excellent contributions. Gavin Hardy received the Lindsey Milne Trophy for exceptional contributions to the industry.

Invited speakers Prof. Houbin Chen, Prof. Sisir Mitra, Prof. Xuming Huang, Prof. Errol Hewett, and organisers Mr. Gavin Hardy and Mr. Derek Donkin (Convener).
International symposium
FROM PAGE 33

To give the delegates a truly South African experience, delegates were treated to a game drive with dinner in the bush in the famous Kruger National Park. There was also entertainment by a marimba band and gumboot dancers during the dinner after the technical tour.

SALGA Chairman, Gavin Hardy, receives the Lindsey Milne Trophy for exceptional contributions to the industry during the gala dinner. The trophy was handed over by Dr. Deon Begemann.

Nursery and orchard visit at Riverside Farm. Deon de Kock explains orchard practices.

Discussing litchi packaging and fruit quality during a pack house visit.

Post-symposium tour group at Hall & Sons orchard.