



FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK

The 2013 harvest has been completed with mixed results. Up north the result was not good, with some farmers reporting up to 80% down on the previous year. Nelspruit and the Onderberg have generally been good with some record results. In respect of the revenue, as opposed to productivity of the orchards, we have been helped by the weak Rand and superior prices for better quality, especially size. It appears that the northern regions have suffered from a similar fate as the Onderberg for 2012. We await feedback from our northern members as to why this year has been so cruel. The net result of this is that while some had a disaster, others achieved record returns.

This overall poor result will focus our executives' and directors' minds on bal-

ancing the books. With lower revenue, once again, we will have to reduce expenses, particularly administration. A major reason for this expense is the eternal wasted time spent on "members" who duck and dive to avoid paying levies. Johan has made excellent progress in closing the net. This year will see a major drop in "membership" as a result of people being kicked out for non-payment. We will be ruthless on the free loaders. Despite efforts to simplify the levy collection system (by switching to a per hectare system, requiring very little admin), the AGM voted to continue to base levies on declared production in four different areas (local, export, direct, bakkie sales). It is obvious that this is an administrative nightmare and fertile ground for the dishonest to escape paying. I appeal again to the membership to re-consider a per ha basis of paying levies to eliminate a completely impossible time consuming, wasteful, soul destroying admin task. *It makes no sense* in this day and age of eliminating cost.

In any event, when Johan has caught the culprits, I predict that the membership will fall to such an extent that a hard core of serious paying operators will be left, probably the 10 to 20% who pays 90% of the levies collected. Administration and expenses will be reduced with little effect on revenue. When this happens the collections will be easy from 20 to 30 visible members, and the system of collection will be irrelevant. The larger members who have for decades paid R100 000s of levies will be appeased, and not suffer the indignity of seeing their levies wasted on chasing the delinquents, but spent on value adding efforts. Should this happen, it may mean that the remaining serious minded members may decide to fund additional research and "knowledge capture" projects, to plug any gaps. This action is imperative if we are to survive as SALGA. The alternative is that some larger operators (and some are angry and have threatened to resign) may get together and declare UDI, and do their own thing. We do not

want this to happen. It is heartening to note that Ed Grantham in Natal has responded by doing a full recon of his situation and will rectify his situation from 2007. Thank you Ed. Up north Johan Spies demanded that his staff and Subtrop immediately rectify his short fall last year. Baie dankie Johan.

A growing reason for lower production at various farms has been the greater emphasis on pruning large trees. More and more farmers are re-shaping and resizing their trees. Clearly major cut backs affect the following year's production.

One must also wonder about the effects of global warming, and whether you are a believer or not, it cannot be denied that there are real weather pattern changes taking place.

A puzzling feature every year is the wide difference between the yields of various orchards under the same climatic conditions. It appears that the yields vary from 3 to 4 tons/ha to 15 and 20 tons/ha, and anywhere in between. This suggests that our farming practices have a greater influence on yield than climate and the unknowns or uncontrollable. It also suggests that in an unfavourable climatic year, poor farming practices will leverage the negative effect. It seems to me that the critical mass of farming practice knowledge residing in SALGA is such that inadequate farming practices can be reduced substantially by members who are privy to this information. I encourage you to attend the study groups and to use the web site to keep abreast of farming practices. In addition, this allows you to interact with the very experienced farmers, who have assembled a wealth of knowledge over many decades. I for one have learnt an enormous amount and am extremely grateful to those who have taught me in recent years.

As our environment changes, so must our practices. Interaction between members and our contacts overseas help to gain an insight into what may lie ahead. For example, the pruning of trees is not only for improved orchard yield, but also for the ever increasing



difficulties with the picking labour, or vice versa. In years to come nobody will climb the trees to pick ... accelerated by the growing obesity problem. Smaller trees and more density in the orchards maybe forced on us, for the same reason. But a myriad of issues have to be considered when making such decisions. Making a decision on the size of trees would take into account all of the following factors and the influence of one on another: orientation of rows (north / south); spacing along rows; height of trees; ease of picking; irrigation restraints; tree leaf surface area; access for equipment (if any) i.e. spraying and picking; labour and / or equipment / machine assisted picking; soil conditions; climate; slope of orchard; chosen cultivar; and drainage.

It is encouraging to see how the study groups have improved. Naturally attendance has also improved. Thanks to those who make it happen, you know who you are. The important feature is the quality of interaction and knowledge transfer that takes place.

Sakkie Froneman has made good progress with the importation of new cultivars. The breeding programme will now gain serious impetus and in addition many of these new cultivars will be available for planting on our farms, in the not too distant future. I will be visiting Australia shortly and will bring back more material to accelerate the process. It goes without saying that these cultivars will only be available to members in good standing, *inter alia*, those who have paid their levies. The ARC has been instructed accordingly and the Board of SALGA will approve each case of supply. Sakkie must be commended for his amazing effort in dealing with the plant inspection services in Stellenbosch, a story that cannot be repeated in decent language. Thank you Sakkie ... without you we would have failed again. He will report in full when we meet again. Our research program continues to try and unlock the holy grail of litchis. I wish you all well and success with our unbeatable revenue generator.

Gavin Hardy

