



Fruit South Africa

Derek Donkin
SUBTROP

Fruit South Africa is an umbrella organisation for the SA fruit industry, in a similar manner to which SUBTROP is an umbrella organisation for the subtropical industries. SUBTROP is one of the five members of Fruit South Africa along with the Citrus Growers' Association, Hortgro (deciduous fruit), SA Table Grape Industry and the Fresh Produce Exporters' Forum. Fruit SA is funded by its members as well as through an export council grant from the Department of Trade and Industry.

Dr Konanani Liphadzi is Fruit SA's CEO. She is based in Pretoria. Other staff include SIZA manager, Colleen Chennells, and her assistant, Mariesa Erasmus, who are based in Cape Town. Consultants Dr Mono Mashaba and Mike Holtzhausen also form part of the team concentrating mainly on government and market access issues.

Without a market or markets, any business, including agriculture, is dead in the water. Gaining, retaining and optimising markets for fruit and nuts often involves government to government processes and government regulations. For example, new export markets for South African fruit can only be opened if the requirements relating to pests and diseases of the importing country are met. In addition, import tariffs can make a market unviable, and the only way tariffs can be reduced is through government to government negotiations.

Consequently, the focus of Fruit SA is largely on gaining, retaining and optimising new markets. This involves a lot of work with our government, in order to raise the profile of the fruit industry and make government officials aware of the value of the fruit industry in terms of contribution to the GDP (R25 billion per annum), employment (165 000 jobs) and export earnings (20 billion per annum), as well as the potential to create new jobs to reach the government's goal of creating 1 million new jobs in agriculture by 2030. The aim is greater partnership with government to ensure that the fruit industry is able to continue growing and prospering.

Fruit SA's work in 2015 will include continuing with the SIZA programme to assure best labour practices as required by many retailers in the export market, but also to create favourable labour relations on farms to everyone's benefit. There will also be high level visits to India and countries in the Far East to facilitate access to and growth of exports. And work with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries will continue through the Fruit Industry Value Chain round table to facilitate better cooperation between government and the fruit industry.

SUBTROP's extensionists work hard to produce up-to-date lists of the registered pesticides that have been tested in our industry and thus work – some of these are even biocontrol agents.

Agricultural remedies need to be tested in various production areas under different climatic and soil conditions to ensure that there is no environmental interference with a product. For instance, humidity, pH and temperature can influence the viability of a product. So often it is claimed that snake oil products work in the grain industry somewhere in the Free State. Tree crops are completely different and cannot be compared with soy, maize and wheat. May I add that there would be no merit in trusting the results of testing the snake oil on the backyard-kind of a grower's trees ... Enquire whether the leading companies in the industry are using it – if not, there is usually a good reason. All the leading companies in the subtropical industry are involved in product testing.

One of the most important aspects which will be sensitive to some Steves, is how compatible the snake oil is with your current, conventional products – especially if Steve's snake oil is a biological control product. There is ample evidence in scientific literature that biocontrol alone is usually not sustainable. Other products, for instance organic fertilisers, often have unreliable, variable nutrient content concentrations and one should be cautious when using them. There is no need in doing a soil analysis, getting a fertiliser recommendation and then applying the incorrect amount of nutrients based on wrongful product information.

Now, before chasing this poor chap away, it is worthwhile to note that some of these products do hold great potential. If you as a grower believe that Steve is selling something worthwhile, it would be wise not to treat an entire farm with such a product. Should you be persuaded, convey to Steve that you will test his product by treating half an orchard. Mark and document the treatments clearly – preferably your current product on the one side versus Steve's super-duper snake oil on the other. Steve should be willing to sign a document that states that if your current product outperforms Steve's product in this trial, Steve or his company must pay the losses that incurred as a result of poor product performance. This sounds harsh, but since Steve's company believes registration is not necessary for this wonderful snake oil, you still need that assurance.

It is important to note that in agriculture there is no silver bullet that will solve all your problems. SUBTROP's extensionists work hard to produce up-to-date lists of the registered pesticides that have been tested in our industry and thus work – some of these are even biocontrol agents. The next time when "this product will solve all your problems" claims are made, you might want to consider to "un-Steve" yourself ... 