

Citrus Summit summary

By Wolfe Braude

“SA is the 2nd largest exporter of citrus globally, and the industry expects production to grow from 160mln cartons to 260mln over the next decade. The 2023 Citrus Summit, held this week from 14-16 March 2023 in Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape, unpacked for over 500 delegates the thinking and data underpinning the expected increase. With young trees already in the ground, and maturing, the numbers are not mere guestimates. To accommodate this growth, expanded logistics, pack houses, cold stores, Port logistics, and market access will be needed. Speakers and panels at the Summit tackled topics from market access, transformation (presented and chaired by Agbiz’s Chief Economist, Wandile Sihlobo), logistics, megatrends in agriculture, levers of change, energy, sustainability and global citrus dynamics.

The Summit was graced by the Minister of Agriculture, Tokyo Didiza; Transnet CEO Portia Derby, the MEC for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform in the Eastern Cape, NN Pieters; the DG of DALLRD, Mooketsa Ramasodi, and senior officials from the Province and Transnet. Minister Didiza, in her Opening Address, spoke to the Department’s plans for market access trips to East Asia in 2023, the work of the Fruit Industry Value Chain Roundtable (on which Agbiz sits), and improvements in phytosanitary surveillance. The Minister encouraged the industry to relook at Africa as a possible market and spoke to the paralysing impact of the EU’s indefensible cold treatment measures for citrus, and the inconclusive outcome of negotiations thus far with the EU. Market access Panel speakers noted that a WTO Panel was the next step that could be followed in the EU dispute if government chooses to take the WTO process forward in the face of the EU’s refusal thus far to revisit the measures. Such a Panel and its outcome would however take around 18 months to be concluded. As a result, CGA and the industry are actively working with members to explore how best to manage the expected severe impact of the EC measures in 2023 and 2024.

Minister highlighted the Department's efforts to address the crucial energy needs of the sector through the Ministerial Working Group and noted an upcoming meeting with the newly appointed Minister of Electricity in this regard. Transnet CEO, Ms Portia Derby spoke to the challenges of improving SA logistics across rail, Ports, and terminals. CGA participates in the logistics Interface Agreement Agbiz has signed with Transnet to partner on restoring, strengthening and expanding national agri logistics corridors without which the promise of fruit exports, market access and Vision 260 cannot be realised. Citrus is a key component of SA’s remarkable positive trade balance, and the booked-out Summit testifies to the commitment and momentum of growers and the entire industry value chain that places precious fiscal resources in the State’s hands for national development.”