

New paperless system saves South Africa's fruit export sector R250m

After a successful pilot and implementation by Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), the roll out of a new e-Certification IT platform to the fruit industry in 2019, will save the industry at least R250 million over the next five years.

The e-Certification platform, which could be used by other agricultural sectors in the future, will deliver official export documentation to trading partners in electronic form and replace all paper equivalents. Governments exchange documentation as a means to certify that consignments of agricultural products meet the importing country's sanitary and phytosanitary rules. Electronic phytosanitary certificates (e-Phyto's) for citrus were delivered to the Netherlands as part of the pilot exercise.

In 2013, the citrus industry began working on an IT platform to capture, store and report all relevant data that is necessary for certification, known as PhytClean. Paul Hardman of the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) developed Phytclean to improve efficiencies, reduce errors and cut down time and costs involved in the issuing of certificates to South African citrus growers.

The success of the PhytClean system was seen when European Union (EU) compliance requirements for False Coddling Moth (FCM) came into force from 1 January 2018. FCM is a pest affecting some agricultural products, including the citrus industry, and it requires special management to maintain market access. For citrus these requirements were entirely managed on Phytclean during 2018 to support this R18 billion citrus market.

South Africa's fruit export market is valued at R30 billion and the adoption of Phytclean by the agricultural fruit export sector will see a saving of R250 million over the next five years through improved efficiency, minimising errors (human and systemic) and reducing processing time.

PhytClean has been adopted by other fruit sectors since 2016 and became a Fruit South Africa (FSA) initiative. Then in March 2018 DAFF approached FSA to extend the functionality of PhytClean and build the e-Certification aspects so that the entire certification process is paperless. Both these platforms are being developed by FSA for DAFF, who now owns them.



The export process of fresh fruit is highly complex and subject to the application of highly technical handling and shipping procedures, taking into account that the product is highly perishable and required to be:

- Compliant with quality standards by importing countries
- Safe for human consumption,
- Compliant with various special market- and permit market access restrictions and phytosanitary protocols,
- Packed, presented, stored and transported according to variable specifications

PhytClean has more than 3000 users registered from fruit sectors including citrus, apple, pear, peach, nectarine, table grape and pomegranate. Growers, packhouses, exporters and supply chain service providers are all connected to the system.

Paul Hardman, Project Manager of the e-Certification Project Team at CGA and FSA, said, “Phytclean has proven to be tremendously effective in improving supply chain efficiencies and being able to show that we are compliant at each step, so our growers are very happy to be using it. E-Certification now takes this to the next level where DAFF processes can be redesigned to be paperless and become more efficient”

The DAFF together with FSA teams hold stakeholder consultations in different regions, and all entities involved in export of agricultural products are encouraged to participate.

The upcoming stakeholder consultations are as follows:

- Western Cape- 27th November 2018
- Eastern Cape- 28th November 2018
- Limpopo- 5th December 2018.

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