

Arnauld Le Gualès - DSA (Direct South Africa)

"Biggest growth area without a doubt, is lemons and sweet potatoes"

French company Direct South Africa (DSA), is a joint venture between Pomanjou Group in France and Dutoit Group in South Africa which imports fruit from South Africa dealing mainly in top fruit, citrus and sweet potatoes.

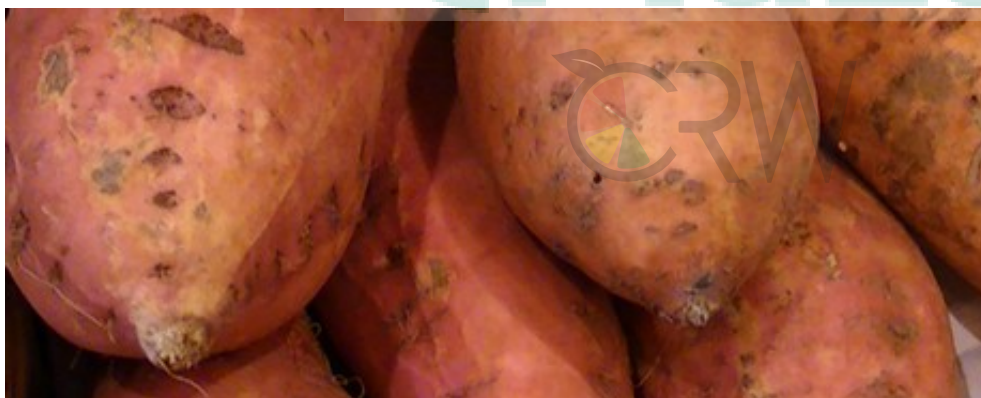
The companies have been working together since the de-regulation in South Africa. Pomanjou is best known for its apples and pears and as Dutoit started developing the stonefruit, grape and sweet potato production the two companies decided to create a company totally dedicated to marketing South African fruit in on the French market.



Direct sourcing is done by Dutoit while import, repacking and logistics are carried out by Pomanjou thus keeping the whole supply chain simple.

Unlike retailers in other countries, the French retailers do not seem to demand a 12 month supply from one company and tend to go for a supplier closest to the source of the fruit according to Arnauld Le Gualès, Commercial Director at DSA.

The company handles around 2000 tons of oranges, 2000 tons of pears, 800 tons of sweet pots another 6000 tons is made up of grapes, stonefruit, apples and some onions.



"The biggest growth area at the moment is, without a doubt, lemons and sweet potatoes," explains Arnauld. "The increase in lemon production in South Africa is very big and we are working closely with a retailer to develop South African lemons. They're more used to Argentinian lemons but production there has been less in the last few years due to climatical issues but it is also a case of an unstable production, and dwindling quality, this is also the same with Williams pears."

The French are now consuming around 15,000 tons of sweet potatoes, while 5 years ago that was just 10,000 tons. DSA sell the yellow flesh to the retailers and the white to the wholesale and specialist but they are both typical South African varieties.

"We started 4 years ago with 3-4 containers and have now increased that to 50 containers this season. Dutoit have 60 ha of sweet potatoes in production at the moment and are planning to increase this very soon to 100 ha."

When asked if he would look at jumping on the current avocado trend, Arnauld replied, "Possibly in the future, but for avocados you need to have a full strategy and it is difficult if you only have one import channel as you need to have the wholes operation with ripening rooms etc."

Citrus

The situation with South African citrus is constantly changing, a few weeks ago there had still been no rain after a period of prolonged intense heat, but in the last couple of weeks the north of the country, has a reasonable amount which will positively affect the sizes of the oranges, but it is hard to tell by how much. The Eastern Cape has had a pretty normal season, but the Western Cape is still quite dry, although they did get some rain over Easter.



"Branding is not important to us as we repack all the fruit using Pomanjou Facilities when it arrives in France. Net program for juice varieties and one layer tray for dessert varieties," explains Arnaud.

As for concerns about CBS and an ever present threat of a stop on exports of South African citrus to Europe as the season nears an end, Arnaud is not worried, "The South Africans do a great job ensuring the citrus has been through all the processes which are in place. If there is a stop on exports we will deal with it, its a situation which all importers would have to deal with so we are all in the same boat."

With storage techniques improving all the time, Arnaud agrees that in the coming year there will most likely be less demand for Southern Hemisphere apples, but he said there is still a demand for Pink Ladys.

Pears is a different story, as there is a shortage of pear production in France, there is a big demand for Doyenné du Comice and Abete Fetel all year round and of course Williams, "We are confident that our pear business will remain strong, this year they will import 2000 tons of pears."

Amaud Le Gualès

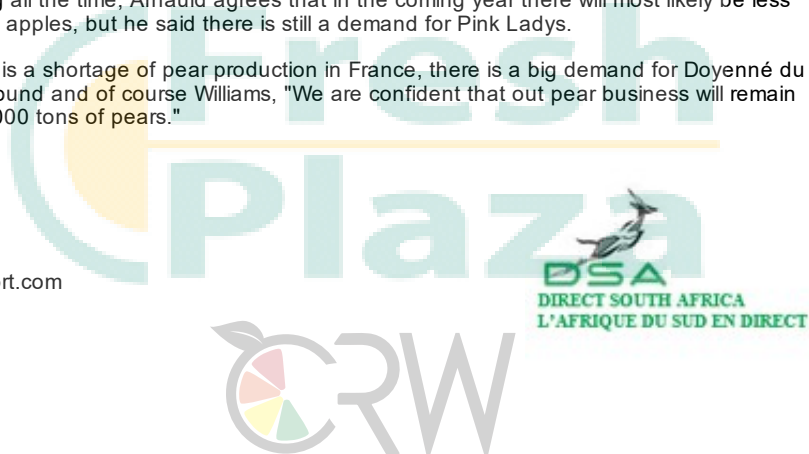
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Publication date: 4/8/2016

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