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New quality management system in the pipeline for perishable exports?

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CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association, Justin Chadwick.

Research is under way that could see the introduction of a quality management system (QMS) in the perishable sector for pack houses that meet certain criteria.

According to Citrus Growers' Association CEO Justin Chadwick, for many years industry has requested the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Daff) to implement a QMS – and he says the new Agricultural Products Standards Act allows for implementation of such a methodology.

“Daff and PPECB are in the process of researching this option – and hopefully this will result in a move to QMS which means that growers/pack houses take responsibility for their system.”

It's all part and parcel of an industry drive to improve systems that ensure zero tolerance when it comes to fruit quality.

“Any exporter of fresh produce will tell you that the one non-negotiable when it comes to repeat orders is quality. You can get everything else right, you can offer all sorts of

additional benefits – but if your quality is not as expected then you can be pretty sure that the buyer will not come back for more,” says Chadwick.

“Most (if not all) pack houses and export agents have their own employees checking quality through the harvesting and packing process, while every consignment is inspected by the Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB).”

The PPECB stamp of quality assurance ensures that every consignment passed for export meets the minimum standard – but with an industry as geographically spread as the South African citrus industry, getting inspectors into every pack house to inspect every consignment is no easy task, says Chadwick.

“With the present “end point inspection “ (EPI) methodology inspectors travel extensively throughout the industry, many living a fairly nomadic life – moving from citrus to deciduous fruit as the seasons change.”

The EPI methodology is however under scrutiny – and hence the push for a QMS.

Once a QMS is introduced, those producers with inadequate systems and those with system failure will remain on or revert back to end point inspections - which is a big incentive to get the system right, and ensure effectiveness, says Chadwick.

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