FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO (6/13)

Justin Chadwick (8 February 2013)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK "*The trouble with simplification is that things are complicated. The trouble with things being complicated is that we need to simplify them" Charles Crawford*

FRUIT LOGISTICA

The focus of many people's attention at Fruit Logistica has been on the impact of EU decisions on Citrus Black Spot (CBS) and how the season is to pan out. I must have recited the CBS story a 100 times, and the response from importers has been interesting. There seems to be two groups – the first have asked "how can we help"; these are importers who have built up relationships with South Africa and who share a responsibility in finding a solution. The second group says "it is your problem – find a solution". Although we accept that we have our work cut out, this type of response is unhelpful. Tortoise like retreating into a shell, hoping that when you stick your neck out again everything will be better is not going to solve the problem. My message to South Africans is let's take note of who says what and who offers to assist, and put that in the memory bank.

The very recent advancement of Uruguay's imminent access to the USA further isolates the European Food Safety Agency's (FSA) conclusion on the risk of CBS and the appropriateness of EU measures. In their rule making procedure the USA document states "***In a previous revision of the PRA, citrus black spot (Guignardia Citricarpa Kiely) was included as a quarantine pathogen likely to follow the pathway. However we have since determined that fresh or dried citrus fruit is not epidemiologically significant as a pathway for the introduction of citrus black spot because the combination of conditions required for disease transmission from harvested fruit is highly unlikely. Therefore, analysis of this pathogen was removed from the document."***

So leading CBS scientists in South Africa and the USA have concluded that the fruit is not a pathway, and that the EU member states have climatic conditions unsuitable for establishment of CBS. One would hope that the EU authorities question their reliance on the poor science produced by EFSA.

Nevertheless as much as we shake our heads and gnash our teeth at the lack of scientific expertise within EFSA, we have an immediate issue of meeting the EU's unjust requirements. While in Berlin we have been exposed to a perception that needs to be corrected. The perception is that South Africa does not take the CBS issue seriously and that not enough is being done to control the disease in South Africa. Nothing can be further from the truth. South African growers spend hundreds of millions of rand's on control measures on the farms, in packhouses and in the ports in an endeavor to meet the EU requirements. Interception rates have decreased from the high levels of the early 2000's. We are the first to admit that it is a difficult disease to control, and even more difficult to monitor - but anybody who states that we are not taking this thing seriously and doing what we can needs a reality check.

There is also a perception that South Africa does not communicate what we are doing with the EU. That too needs to be challenged – The Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) of the EU have visited South Africa on many occasions in order to inspect our CBS measures – and in every case they have confirmed that South Africa has adopted their recommendations and that they are satisfied with our systems. In 2012 there was a period when correspondence was slow – but this has been corrected and once again the EU has been supplied with full information.

We would like to thank the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Administrator for setting up the facilitated bilateral consultation due at the end of February. We hope that the EU will have confidence in South Africa's CBS risk management measures. We hope that the 2013 season will not be disrupted by arbitrary setting of compliance targets, and that we can manage the risk to the satisfaction of the EU, recognizing that the measure itself is under dispute.

One of the highlights of this trip to Berlin has been the engagement with South African Embassy officials – South Africans can be proud of our missions abroad – and Ambassador Stophile and his staff are a shining example of those who serve South Africa with distinction. They have taken note of the CBS issue, and the devastating impact that market closure would have on the livelihood of thousands of South Africans. They have pledged to take this issue on board, and give it priority at high level engagements with their EU counterparts. Our Embassy in Brussels – with Ambassador Nkosi and Agricultural Attached Thapsana Molepo at the helm, has also elevated this issue in their discussions.

As a signatory to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) we recognize a countries rights and responsibilities to protect their flora and fauna – however we insist that there be technical justification for such protection, and that the protection measures are proportional to the risk. In the case of CBS the technical basis for the EU measure has never been established, and any heightened restriction to South Africa's citrus trade with the EU will be challenged at the highest level. Let us hope that sense will prevail, and that the end of February meeting finds a workable solution.

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CITRUS GROWERS' FUND THEIR FUTURE THROUGH THE LEVY ADMINISTERED BY THE CGA