FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO (03/16)

Justin Chadwick 5 February 2016

Isn't it interesting that the same people who laugh at science fiction listen to weather forecasts and economists? Kelvin Throop III

DROUGHT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Many months ago the weather forecasters got it right when they predicted heavier rainfall in the south eastern regions of South Africa, and low rainfall in the rest of South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. The heavier rainfall was experienced towards the end of 2015 resulting in full rivers and storage dams in the **Eastern and southern Cape** – for citrus this included the Sundays river, Gamtoos river (Patensie) and Kat river catchment areas. This region produces over 25% of South Africa's export citrus and is well set for a good 2016 season.

The lower rainfall in the **north** was accompanied by high temperatures. Dry conditions prevail and all are hoping that the next part of the forecast comes true – this being the prediction of late summer rains in the north.

The **Western Cape** receives its rain in winter – usually!! In 2015 the rainfall was 69% of average, this coupled with lighter snowfall has slowed down the river flow leaving the Clanwilliam dam only 53% full (20/1 – in 2015 at same time it was 72%). As a result restrictions of 37% have been implemented.

In the **Northern Cape** the Van der Kloof dam is 65% full and the Gariep dam 49%. Although some rain has fallen it has been in catchment area below the dam, thus not influencing dam levels. The Vaalharts storage weir which feeds the irrigation scheme is at 70% (2015 87%).

In **Mpumalanga** province average dam levels are at 60.8% - down from 92.4% a year ago. The dam feeding Marble Hall and Groblersdal regions (Loskop dam) is at 61.2%, from 100% a year ago. Dams feeding Onderberg and Nelspruit are under similar pressure; Driekoppies at 49% vs 91% in 2015, Kwena 56% vs 100% and Vygeboom 72% vs 100%. Ohrigstad dam is standing at just 9% (2015 55%). Some rain has fallen (25 to 55 mm) but clearly a lot more is needed.

Kwazulu Natal, and particularly the northern parts, is suffering; Hluhluwe dam is at 20% (2015 60%) and Pongolapoort dam at 48% (2015 72%). The Bivane dam that feed Pongola is just 13% full (or should that read 87% empty!!). The Goedertrou dam which feeds Nkwalini is at 27% - in 2015 it was 51%.

In **Limpopo province** the Letsitele area is under 30-35% water allocations, the level of the Tzaneen dam has fallen to just 36%; this combined with the heat has put considerable stress on citrus trees. Less than 100 mm has fallen this season; very little from mid-December. The rainfall that has fallen has been sporadic and not area wide. Farm storage dams are down to 25% in capacity, boreholes have been drilled but cannot keep up with demand. Similar conditions prevail in Hoedspruit, although some spots have recorded higher rainfall than Letsitele. The Blyderivierpoort dam is at 55% (100% in 2015).

The Limpopo river is not dammed at all, and the flow is well below average. Some sporadic rain has fallen in the far northern Limpopo region, with 85 to 130 mm reported in different localities in **Zimbabwe**. The Zhave dam which influences the Umzingwani river which in turn is used to irrigate some Zimbabwean citrus is at 60% of capacity.

Most growers have expressed concern about the 2017 crop should the late summer rains fail to arrive. Many dams will then be critically low and water used to set the 2017 crop will in all likelihood be unavailable.

One positive to take out of the dry weather is that the fruit quality in 2016 will be excellent, and pest and disease problems should be minimal.

While the impact of the drought on CGA members is concerning, what is equally disturbing is the social discontent that will undoubtedly result from drought effects. It is no secret that South Africa will have to import considerable quantities of the staple diet in South Africa – white maize; it is just the quantum that is unknown. Already maize future prices are reaching record levels; and maize meal prices are also on the increase. These could follow the price increases of some vegetables which have doubled between November 2015 and January 2016. For those low income earners who spend 50% plus of their earnings on food this is a huge blow – if food prices double how can they spend 100% of disposable income on food? Unfortunately in South Africa social discord often takes on a violent nature and all are affected. There is much to be done to address the crisis – sources of white maize need to be found (very few countries have a surplus); infrastructure that normally imports a maximum of 3 million tons of grain will now have a possible 8 million tons to deal with; and how do you address ability to pay? The citrus industry has a central role in food security – the wages paid to over 100 000 South Africans ensures that they can feed themselves and their families.

The CRI has produced a Cutting Edge (Number 208) entitled **MANAGEMENT OF CITRUS ORCHARDS DURING TIMES OF DROUGHT.** Growers who have not received the document should contact jeanDeG@cri.co.za . This document contains general advice on how to manage an orchard during these dry times; with specific emphasis on irrigation and fertilisation.

CUTTING EDGE

Three other Cutting Edges of importance have been recently released: Number 207 Export Citrus Post Harvest Labelling Considerations; Number 209 Further Update on Post-Harvest Treatment Declarations and 210 Certified Nurseries.