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With only four months to go before 2022 winds to a close, it's difficult to take in and digest all that has played out thus far. That said, the fruit industry is most certainly earning its stripes, as we boldly navigate challenge after challenge.

Attending the SIZA Strategic session, among others, was both stimulating and informative. SIZA remains instrumental in promoting SA to some of the key markets, as a source of sustainably produced fruit.

But what has stood out as an inspiration to me during August is being able to celebrate and reflect on womanhood – in and out of the industry. Mrs Vangile Titi-Msumza (Fruit SA Board Chairperson), and I share our sentiments [here](#).

The fruit industry continues to demonstrate commitment towards integrating women, as it should. And the fruits continue to show – no pun intended. Women occupying various key positions are growing in their numbers, as they contribute meaningfully and sustainably to this dynamic industry.

I also celebrate with colleagues at Hortgro, the approval of in-transit cold treatment for South African apple and pear exports to India, which will allow shipment of quality fruit to India in a short span of time.

But while the road ahead doesn't seem to let up for the fruit industry in terms of adversity, soon we will look back on this time as a momentous era in our history.

I wish everyone in our industry and all stakeholders, strength as we shoulder the rest of 2022.

TRANSFORMATION



Meet Unati Speirs

Unati Speirs, Hortgro's newest board member, has built an illustrious career in agriculture that spans over 20 years. She is a farmer and businesswoman whose sights are set firmly on continued success.

Born and raised in East London, Unati attended an Afrikaans boarding school where she wasn't allowed to speak any other language. It was torturous but worth it, she recalls.

Unati obtained a BSc degree in agriculture at the University of Fort Hare, followed by a BSc degree in physics in the US. When she returned to SA, she tackled an honours degree focussing on poultry farming. "I never stopped studying. I didn't stop registering for programs until I was 40," says Unati who's "a scientist first and foremost".

After university, she joined the Institute of Chartered Accountants and worked at KPMG, whilst studying towards a BCom degree in accounting. Amongst others, she has worked as investment promotion manager for agriculture at the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (dtic), and occupied various roles abroad.

Hoping to encourage more women to get involved in agriculture, Unati says, "There is a need for women in agriculture and it is a wealth creator. Women have to be knowledgeable about it. We are generations behind."





Mecia Petersen joins SATI

Mecia Petersen is the new market development and communications manager for SATI.

Reflecting on her exciting new role, Mecia says, "It is important that both current – especially our traditional strong-hold markets – and potential destination markets view SA as a supplier of choice, and that they understand that our industry still offers quality produce."

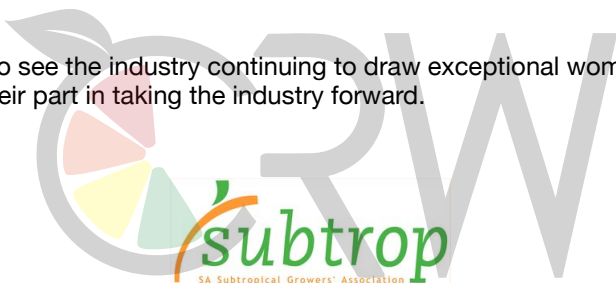
She highlights three main focus areas: providing producer information, consumer and market focus, and market development.

On being a woman in agriculture, Mecia shares how she takes pride in being counted amongst the women who constitute approximately 40% of the agricultural labour force on the African continent.

True to form, Mecia got to work raising funds to secure scholarships to complete her Master's degree in the UK.

Graduating with distinction, Mecia holds a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) from Nottingham University Business School. She also holds a B-Tech Tourism Management (cum laude) qualification from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), where she received the Top Student Award from the faculty.

It's heartening to see the industry continuing to draw exceptional women who are ready to play their part in taking the industry forward.



Transformation remains a strategic focus

Subtrop understands the strategic importance of sustainable transformation.

They were honoured to have Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) Minister Thoko Didiza as a keynote speaker at the Subtrop Transformation Summit earlier this year. In her speech, the minister stressed the importance of obtaining funding and challenged the banks to operate more fairly in the agricultural sector. She also urged black farmers to become more robust decision makers on their farms.

The rest of the speaker line up comprised members of national and provincial government, representatives from the Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB) and Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), Prokon, RecruitAgri, Source BI, and commercial and emerging growers.

The goal of the Transformation Summit is to inform, connect, inspire and address challenges relating to transformation. And the 200 participants in attendance included emerging and commercial growers, farm managers, government officials, private sector role-players, banks and other individuals from the industry.

During the Summit Zander Ernest from Allesbeste donated 20 000 trees to the Venda growers for their development. He highlighted that the donation was partly to challenge the industry and other big operations to become actively involved in driving transformation in the industry.

INDUSTRY



Strengthening public-private partnership ties

For Berries ZA market access ranks high on their list of strategic objectives (as it does for the rest of the fruit industry).

In fact, they recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Western Cape Department of Agriculture to further entrench the close collaboration between government and the industry. This is particularly significant in terms of creating opportunities for emerging farmers in the Western Cape.

In the 2022/23 season berry exports to South-East Asia remained at 64 tonnes, while exports to the EU declined by 354% (the most significant decline of the export destinations).

Berries ZA remains focused on these objectives:

- To ensure an economically viable and sustainable berry industry through coordinated joint actions.
- To set uniform rating regulations for South African berries.
- To connect with other berry groups – locally and internationally – for exchange of mutually beneficial information.
- To explore ways to promote the purchase and consumption of berries in local and export markets.
- To conduct relevant research in the berry industry.
- To connect with DALRRD, as well other government departments and industry stakeholders.
- To collate and disseminate relevant industry information.

For the 2022/23 season the total export estimate is 25 000 tonnes (up 20% from last year).

Transnet update

The FPEF reports that engagements with Transnet to address ports issues at various levels, are ongoing.

On a positive note, Transnet has received a promising response on their Request for Information (RFI) regarding private sector participation in the Durban Pier 2 and Ngqura Container Terminals (DCT2 and NCT). The planned 25-year special-purpose vehicle (SPV) between Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) and the winning bidders will be created, void of any disposal or sale of the asset. And 25 years on, the terminals will revert fully to TPT.

The next step for Transnet is to issue Request for Proposals (RFPs) to shortlisted respondents from the Request for Qualifications process, this being the third phase in the process to upgrade the two terminals. And shortlisting is subject to a due diligence process undertaken by Transnet. The shortlisted companies comprise 10 for Durban Pier 2 and four for Ngqura, all of whom will have until December 2022 to submit their proposals for adjudication.



Citrus flows smoothly from Durban port

In a *FreshPlaza* article titled “Smooth flow of citrus exports from Durban relieves an anxious industry”, Dave Watts – a logistics consultant to the citrus industry – gives the thumbs up to terminal performance at the Durban Container Terminal. He notes a marked improvement on last year, recalling the calamitous 2021 civil unrest in KwaZulu-Natal in mid-July and the subsequent cyber attack on Transnet.

At the time of writing, the citrus season was at its peak “with between 1.8 and 2 million 15kg cartons of mostly navels and late mandarins loaded out from Durban every week”.

Last year SA exported 161.1 million 15kg cartons of citrus. And this year, the export estimate has been adjusted downwards to 164.6 million 15kg cartons – a record nonetheless, remarks Watts.

Lauding the vigilance around reefer traffic at the Durban port, he also highlights that “No containers have had to be turned away because of slot unavailability.”

This Durban Container Terminal update is rather encouraging, notwithstanding other port, road and rail challenges faced by the industry.



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