

Remarks by Fhumulani Ratshitanga on the occasion of the e-Certification celebration held on 09th May 2022 at Birchwood, Boksburg, Gauteng

Fruit SA and the eCert project

Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Mrs Thoko Didiza, His Excellency Mr G Landheer, Vice Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Kingdom of Netherlands, His Excellency, Han Peters, Ambassador of the Netherlands to South Africa, Colleagues, Honoured guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Fruit South Africa is honoured to participate in the celebration of e-Certification this afternoon. This occasion underscores the considerable progress that has been registered since the birth of this exciting project.

The project is a product of many dedicated minds and committed hands who saw it from start and continue to support its growth. Fruit South Africa, the organisation I represent, is proud to have been one of e-Certification's midwives.

Before sharing our involvement with you, please permit me to engage in what might appear as a little marketing exercise by introducing Fruit SA to those who may not be familiar with our organisation and its role in the agricultural value chain.

Fruit SA is an umbrella body of fruit industry associations. These are:

- Berries ZA,
- Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa,
- The Fresh Produce Exporters Forum,
- Hortgro (representing the pome and stone fruit growers),
- SA Table Grape Industry; and
- the SA Subtropical Growers Association (representing avocado, litchi and mango growers).

Our vision is to build a competitive, equitable, and sustainable fruit industry which contributes positively to the socio-economic fortunes of the country and our participation in the e-Certification project is testimony to our commitment to this vision.

It all started when the requirements for Citrus Black Spot and False Coddling Moth became very urgent and complicated for the citrus industry. As a result, the Citrus Growers Association used an online registration platform for phytosanitary registrations for the first time in 2014.

Having seen the benefits of the platform in the citrus industry, the functionality was expanded to Fruit SA in 2017 and re-designed to cater for the needs of other fruit industries. The new tool, which was later known as PhytClean, came into operation during the 2017/18 financial year with phytosanitary registrations taking place for the table grape and deciduous fruit industries. This was when new rules for Citrus Black Spot and False Codling Moth were coming into play in the European Union.

Later in 2017, DALRRD and FSA signed a PhytClean service level agreement for the development and use of a centralised data platform to support the official processes of export and phytosanitary certification.

In March 2018, DALRRD appointed Fruit SA to build an eCertification platform. This was done through a service level agreement which was the expansion of the services to DALRRD beyond managing the PhytClean platform. The object of the new platform was to remove the paper from the export certification process. The PhytClean IP was also transferred to DALRRD on the same year.

Development of this new paperless system required Fruit SA to adapt and create new capacity (people and space). An office was established in Hillcrest, Durban and staff recruited to work on the project.

In 2021, another service level agreement was signed by DALRRD and FSA. This is for the maintenance, continuous system improvement, enhancement, support and operating of the eCert system for the export and import certification of all plant, animal, horticultural (including fish) based products.

Of the many advantages of eCertification has been the industry's gradual migration away from manual based processes used to manage information relating to the phytosanitary certification process. This is an innovation has enhanced the industry's efficiency in export processes. It also helps with resource planning, improve phytosanitary compliance and risk management while giving DALRRD greater visibility about the product along the supply chain.

One can write volumes about this project and Fruit SA's involvement. Perhaps a factor that towers above most is that this was, and still is, a collaborative effort amongst individuals in government, particularly DALRRD and the industry. It also testified to the commitment of the Government and People of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in supporting South Africa for which we remain indebted.

We need to look no further than e-Certification for evidence to demonstrate the fact that South Africans, as indeed South Africa and the developed North, can work together. We can and should use this success story to work together to resolve other challenges in the sector.

Thank you.