

PhytClean Update



PAUL HARDMAN

PhytClean has been launched to enhance the integrity of the export and phytosanitary certificates. Paul Hardman reports on progress during the first five months of 2016 as it stood at the start of June.

Regular readers of the SAFJ are in some or other way linked to the southern African fruit industry, an industry that is predominately export oriented. These readers would also likely know that the general goal of this sector is to maintain and grow exports given the value and opportunities global markets represent. They are key to the sustainability and future of the fruit industry.

Yet, for markets to remain open or to grow, South Africa needs to consistently meet the requirements laid down by our trading partners. From a regulatory perspective, this means complying with the import rules agreed with the receiving country's authorities – all the time! The ultimate evidence of compliance shared between these regulatory authorities are Export and Phytosanitary certificates.

Thus, the primary objective of the PhytClean project is to enhance the integrity of export and phytosanitary certificates. This is essentially done by providing electronic alternative evidence for all the prerequisite steps in the certification process, and to make this evidence available to those that need it when they need it. And hence the project slogan has been: Sharing standardized data electronically to support phytosanitary certification and to enhance the SA fruit supply chain's competitiveness in a global market.

Since providing electronic evidence means having to focus on many of the processes leading up to the issuing of these documents, PhytClean will invariably also have a direct impact on how these processes are implemented. The pilot project running in the citrus sector in 2015 and 2016 has provided good examples of what can be done electronically rather than in paper/manual systems: online orchard registra-

tions for special markets, instant updates to the status of orchards, instant verification of orchard status, shared updates on the database automatically, and loading inspection reports for all to view immediately. In some cases these improvements can go considerably further and eliminate the paperwork altogether to introduce significant savings in time and effort by multiple parties along the chain.

RECENT PHYTCLEAN PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Since the start of the year to May 2016, the PhytClean project has tried to focus on 3 main areas:

- **Make incremental improvements to the Citrus Pilot project:** Here we have seen additional functionality and more users interacting with the system in new ways. Some 1 230 users were registered on the system at the end of May 2016. At least 100 of those are engaging the system daily.
- **DAFF - FSA Service Level Agreement (SLA):** Since the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and Fruit South Africa (FSA) are joint partners in developing the PhytClean data platform, it has been necessary to formalise this arrangement, which is a Service Level Agreement (SLA) whereby DAFF and FSA will jointly build the data platform for use in the fruit export sector. The SLA laid out a structure for formal DAFF and FSA participation in the leadership of the project, while addressing aspects around intellectual property and other legal and operational considerations.
- **Secure appropriate additional resources to fund and manage the project:** The plan has always been that the PhytClean data platform should be self-sustaining and maintained on a "user-pay" basis. Nevertheless, an injection of seed funding was needed to start the development and to provide initial momentum to



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launch the project into the wider fruit sector. FSA has bought into the project.

It is pleasing to report that funding has been secured to cover anticipated expenses for 2016 and going well into 2017, when the user-pay model will kick in. Any additional funding received will assist in making functionality available sooner, rather than later. This is important as the scope of the project has increased and become slightly more complex, with the additional fruit sectors joining in. On the 13th of May 2016 a general stakeholder workshop was held in Stellenbosch to update participants and stakeholders on these developments.

PHYTCLEAN PROJECT MANAGER AND DEVELOPER

Keziah Naidoo was appointed full time from the 1st of May 2016 to help FSA and DAFF build the central data platform. Keziah joins us with both coding, database design and IT project management experience, having previously worked in the finance, logistics and insurance sectors. We welcome Keziah to the team and trust her stay in the fruit sector will be a memorable and enjoyable one. Keziah will be dedicated to the PhytClean project and play an increasing role in the direction and deliverables around the project.

EDI STANDARD

For all IT systems to communicate via EDI (electronic data interchange), it is important that systems “talk the same language”, in other words, the formats and content have to be understandable, predictable and consistent. This can be achieved by formalising EDI standards (or what some term Master Files). A proposal to form an institution to manage the EDI standards for the fruit industry has been adopted, and thus the EDI STANDARDS AUTHORITY FOR THE FRUIT INDUSTRY (ESAFI) is now established. Initial organisational and individual representation on this body has been proposed as follows:

DAFF: Food Safety & Quality Assurance: Willie Madiba;

DAFF: Plant Health: Rejoice Muavhi;

DAFF: Inspection Services: Salamina Maelane;

DAFF: ICT: Maia Boois;

PPECB: John Gray;

PhytClean: Keziah Naidoo;

FPEF: Werner van Rooyen;

CGA: Paul Hardman;

HORTGRO: Jacque Du Preez;

SATI: Dawie Moelich;

Subtropics: John Benadé;

IT service provider/vendors: Four IT vendors are to be confirmed;

AgriHUB: Carol Swarts.

The PhytClean project will provide initial secretarial support to ESAFI. It is possible the composition of ESAFI will change over time and after their first meeting towards the end of June 2016.

One of the first tasks of ESAFI will be to endorse the Citrus Cultivar EDI standards. Work has been going on since mid-2015 to map and “clean up” the different uses of citrus cultivar terminology for EDI purposes. The inputs to this process, including discussions at the workshop on the 13th May 2016, have resulted in a single excel file that shows how the future terminology for these citrus cultivars will be laid out. The PhytClean Cultivar EDI Standard will be used for phytosanitary market registration in September 2016 and Phytosanitary Certification in 2017. A process has been agreed upon on how to add new cultivars to the PhytClean Cultivar EDI Standard, which is available from the PhytClean project team.

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next few months DAFF and FSA will be building the central data platform in anticipation for the next production cycle for citrus. This will be on a new database; with the existing citrus pilot system running until the end of the export season. In the meantime work will also be done to ensure that the systems functionality extends into the other fruit sectors. What has emerged since the beginning of the year is a real sense that PhytClean can truly make a difference in the fruit sector. Readers can anticipate these tools to be rolled out over the next six months and for them to bring about efficiency and real value to their business – no matter how they are linked into the SA fruit export sector.



Keziah Naidoo has been appointed full time on the PhytClean project as Project Manager.



The citrus part of the PhytClean project received partial funding from the Department of Science and Technology's Sector-Specific Innovation Fund under Research for Citrus Exports.