

# SUNDAYS RIVER VALLEY

## THE PLACE IN BETWEEN



DIE JOERNAAL VIR DIE VRUGTEBEDRYF IN SUID-AFRIKA

Somewhere in-between the Northern production areas and the aptly named Citrusdal, lies an area that is somehow often overlooked in spite of the very significant contribution it makes to the South African citrus industry.

Perhaps it is because its people are quietly going about their business without feeling the need to assert themselves, or perhaps it is simply because it has been a long time since the Eastern Cape has produced a competitive rugby team! Whatever the reason for its sometimes obscure identity, the numbers speak for themselves. The following table illustrates the SRV's contribution to the 2007 season's national crop:

| Product            | S.R. Valley       | National Crop     | %          |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Grapefruit         | 285,391           | 14,308,033        | 2%         |
| Lemons             | 4,011,775         | 7,349,753         | 55%        |
| Navels             | 5,000,000         | 18,700,000        | 27%        |
| Valencias          | 6,095,026         | 43,554,707        | 14%        |
| Soft Citrus        | 942,991           | 6,758,439         | 14%        |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>16,335,182</b> | <b>90,670,932</b> | <b>18%</b> |

The story of the Sundays River Valley is very much a story of two settlements – the first at Kirkwood in the upper reaches of this fertile valley and the second some 30 km downstream at Addo. The Sundays River was proclaimed as the eastern border of the Cape Colony in 1775 and the first farms in the area were awarded in 1814. In 1877, James Somers Kirkwood visited

the area and was inspired by a vision of the Sundays River Valley as an organised irrigation scheme. He set out to achieve this but things did not go his way and when he died in 1889 he was financially and spiritually broken.

The first irrigation infrastructure in the Sundays River was completed in the Kirkwood area in 1913 and could irrigate ca. 3 500 ha. In 1906 the Addo Land and Irrigation Co. was formed in the lower end of the Valley by Messrs. Hume and Babcock. Mr. Babcock was the first person to start planting citrus in commercial quantities in 1908. He was also the first exporter of citrus fruit to England. In the 1920's the Addo area benefitted from an initiative of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick's aimed at attracting retired British soldiers to the area after the First World War. Kirkwood in turn became home to Afrikaans families who moved to the area from the Oudtshoorn district after the collapse of the Ostrich feather market in 1914. To this day the Kirkwood farming community is still predominantly Afrikaans, while the Addo community remains quite English. This of course leads to a lot of friendly bantering – with claims that a passport is required to navigate the 30 km from Kirkwood to Addo.

The completion of the Darlington Dam (previously known as Lake Mentz) in 1922 ushered in the large scale production of export citrus in the Valley and in 1924 the Sundays River Cit-



Die Joernaal vir die Vrugtebedryf in Suid-Afrika

by the Sundays River Citrus Company,  
with additions by Pieter Nortje, CGA regional representative for the Sundays River Valley.

rus Co-Operative (SRCC) was formed to facilitate the packing and exporting of growers' fruit. The Darlington Dam's reserve capacity proved inadequate during periods of drought and in 1987 a tunnel was completed to divert water from the Orange River scheme to the Darlington Dam. Thanks to this improvement the Sundays River Valley today has 17 000 ha of listed irrigation rights backed by arguably the most secure source of irrigation water in South Africa. Since 1987, the scheme has not once had to impose restrictions on its members and today it sustains between 12 500 and 13 500 ha of export citrus.

Due to the ideal conditions for the cultivation of citrus in the SRV, 80% of the land under irrigation is used for the production of citrus. This singular focus on citrus has made the SRV a centre of excellence when it comes to production skills and technology. Many growers also still enjoy the benefit of free technical advisory services extended by companies such as the Sundays River Citrus Company. The SRV is quite unique in that its climate is suited to the production of the entire range of citrus cultivars - commencing in late February with Satsumas and running through Clementines, Novas, Minneolas, late Mandarins, Grapefruit, the full range of Navels (picked from mid April until end August), Lemons (3 sets allow for picking from mid March to October) and ending in October with the last Valencias. This allows for a packing period of 8 months.

Other crops produced include lucerne and dairy production.

For a number of years the SRV has been at the forefront of implementing a softer IPM (integrated pest management) approach to pest control. This approach is aided by the fact that, although thrips is a serious problem, the pressure in the SRV tends to be lower than in many other citrus producing regions in SA. Furthermore, the range of naturally occurring pest parasitoids is good and, given the opportunity, they have the



*Picking back in the 1930's - black and white picture obviously!*

ability to play a significant role in suppressing pests such as red scale, mealy bug and even thrips and FCM. These conditions also benefit the SRV's organic growers who produce 80% of the total South African organic citrus crop.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

# Global Trade in Counterfeit Pesticides

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The rise in counterfeit plant protection products (PPP) is becoming a problem across the globe. Economic difficulties and the high cost of inputs may lure producers to “cheaper” alternatives obtained from “new” sources. Yet producers can little afford the financial consequences of using ineffective counterfeit products or bear the loss that may result from the rejection of fruit in the market found to have illegal residues.

**T**he threat posed by well-organised, international counterfeiting organisations is clear from recent cases that can be highlighted:

- September 2008: False information provided to the Registrar (APVMA) in Australia, caused a recall of the product. Later it was found that while a fraud attempt by the product distributor could not be ignored the major focus should be on improving the Registration process for approving usages to reduce the possibility of misleading regulators and users.
- September 2008: A report released by the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) showed that fake pesticides are increasingly present in most European countries. The main finding of the report were:
  - o Untested, unregulated and unapproved pesticides are present in most, if not all, European countries to a greater or lesser degree.
  - o 5%-7% of the pesticide market is affected by counterfeiting and illegal trade. In some regional hot spots, 25% or more of products are fakes.
  - o There is growing evidence that counterfeits are increasingly

produced for and distributed by organised criminal gangs.

o 86% of all types of counterfeited PPPs seized in 2006 at external EU borders came from China. (Legitimate China to EU imports increased by about 380% in the last 7 years, growing 8 times faster than average worldwide pesticides imports into the EU)

- April 2008: A raid in Paraguay (Ciudad del Este) shows significant quantities of counterfeit PPPs originating from China.
- January 2007: Peppers found to have unexpected active ingredient causes major disruption to the supply of peppers in Spain.
- 2007: 560 tonnes of counterfeit PPPs seized in the Ukraine.
- 2005: Sugar beet treated with counterfeit Caribou. 75 ha of beet destroyed on one farm.
- 2004: “Trademarked” product found to have the wrong active ingredient resulted in destruction of field crops in the EU. Cases where fields were permanently destroyed in Italy, France and Spain have also been reported since.

South African fruit producers need to be vigilant. Batch numbers and appropriate level of record keeping and trace-

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There has also been a major drive recently to improve the overall quality of the soils in the SRV. While there have been large new developments (on virgin soil), the traditional citrus producing area of the SRV is characterised by “old” soils, low in organic matter and microbial status, following decades of citrus monoculture. As part of the process to convert the SRV into a more biologically friendly and sustainable area, large volumes of compost (manufactured locally) and humic acid now form an integral part of the production cycle in the SRV. It is a relatively slow, long term process but the aim is to have a positive impact on fruit production and quality and to reduce the reliance on inorganic fertilisers, herbicides and harsh broad spectrum pesticides. There’s a long way to go yet, but the process has been set in motion.

One of the greatest threats to the future stability of South Africa’s agricultural communities remains the dual challenges of Land Reform and Agri-BEE. Even though the SRV is unen-

cumbered by Land Claims due to its early settlement history, commercial players in the area have pro-actively confronted these challenges with the aim of ensuring the future stability of their community. Investment and developmental partnerships have been formed with Government and NGO’s and today at least 10% of the area’s fruit already comes from black owned farming enterprises.

The process is ongoing and a lot of focus is being placed on skills transfer through development programmes for black farm managers who might later also become land owners in their own right.

Another problem facing the SRV is that although it is merely a stone’s throw from Port Elizabeth port, the infrastructure and facilities cannot cope with the year on year growth. What should be to Sundays River Valley citrus growers’ advantage is often negated by these shortages in logistics and capacity and is now considered a priority which needs attention.