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INDUSTRY TAKES OWNERSHIP WITH LAUNCH OF NEW LAB



Dr Renate Smit (PHYLA Manager), Nicholas Dicey (Hortgro Chairman), and Stephen Rabe (Hortgro Science Chairman) at the opening of the new facility.

Stellenbosch. - The Hortgro phytosanitary laboratory, PHYLA, officially launched on 27 January 2023. The event was held at the new facility on Stellenbosch University's Welgevallen Experimental Farm in Stellenbosch. The facility is managed by Dr Renate Smit, an entomologist and the phytosanitary facility manager and researcher at Hortgro.

According to Smit, PHYLA represents an integrated approach as it is an insectary combined with horticulture research.

The facility enables Hortgro to conduct crucial market access-related research on fumigation and cold sterilisation in-house, where previously the research was

outsourced. The establishment of PHYLA will allow researchers to test different technologies on fruits, insects, and pathogens to evaluate which procedures are necessary to ensure local produce can be exported.

The facility is unique in that it allows for integrated research on deciduous fruit, where tests can be conducted on fruit and insects simultaneously. As a result of this research, Dr Smit will be able to assess technology that will be able to kill insects while maintaining fruit quality and examine if current protocols can be improved upon. These technologies can then be practically applied as postharvest treatments on export fruit. This will improve deciduous fruits' access to new markets and maintain current ones for the industry.

"Industry is taking charge and ownership of its future destiny in this sphere. The facilities being put in place through PHYLA, and the knowledge and human capacity generated in the process, will help ensure this. It provides us with the capacity to be proactive and to react quickly to new issues that may affect market access," said Jacques du Preez, General Manager: Trade and Markets.

The PHYLA research facility includes the following:

- Four controlled-environment cold rooms (3.0 x 2.5 metres) with a capacity of 3 500 kilograms of fruit per room.
- A fumigation chamber inside a controlled-environment cold room.
- Laboratory and workspace for researchers.
- A wet laboratory for prepping fruit and evaluating fruit quality.
- A facility housing insect colonies.
- Storage facilities.
- A refrigeration plant, a nitrogen generator, and monitoring equipment.

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