

SA PEARS ARE (FINALLY) GOING TO CHINA

Hortgro the governing body of the South African Deciduous Fruit Industry announced that market access has finally been granted for South African pears to China.

This comes after many years of dedication and hard work by a team of industry and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) officials. The international travel restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic added more than a year to the signing of the South African pear protocol that initially was planned to take place in 2020. The signing was supposed to take place in person in China, and after a long wait, the agreement has finally been concluded remotely.

"We are absolutely ecstatic that we have finally concluded this process that started many years ago," Jacques du Preez, Hortgro General Manager: Trade and Markets, said.

South African apples gained access to China six years ago. The pear protocol was signed and access agreed upon by the Chinese Minister of GACC (General Administration of Customs China) on 29 November 2021. The agreement was subsequently couriered to South Africa and signed on 13 December by Minister Thoko Didiza of DALRRD. As a final step orchard and packhouse registrations and verification still needs to be concluded in order for the first container of pears to be shipped to China, but this process is already underway. This verification is also planned to be a virtual process, one of the positive outcomes of the Covid restrictions.

“We would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, and her department's officials that worked tirelessly to make this possible. We also want to acknowledge the behind the scenes hard work by the industry scientists and specialists.”

“We look forward to much closer, mutually beneficial, working relationships with the Chinese authorities in order to expedite market access between the two countries in much shorter timeframes in future. We can't wait to ship our first container of delicious, ethically-produced pears that adheres to the strictest food safety protocols, to China. We view the Chinese market as crucial to the sustainability and further growth of our pear industry. We have experienced tremendous growth in exports to other Eastern nations and now we can supply Chinese consumers with our delicious pears as well,” Du Preez said.

According to Du Preez, 22% of SA pear exports in 2021 were destined for the Far East and Asian markets. And healthy growth in this region had been experienced over the past five years. The prolonged drought experienced in South Africa has largely been broken due to good winter rains and although it's still early days, there is great optimism for a good 2022 crop.

Orchards and packhouses have been provisionally registered with DALRRD in anticipation of gaining market access, so South African growers and exporters are more than ready to serve the Chinese market.

The South African apple and pear industry also launched a pilot market development campaign for apples in China, early in 2021. This campaign will in future now also include pears. The campaign will support and hopefully grow exports and position SA as the preferred supplier of top quality fruit in this vast market.

Hortgro's Executive Director, Anton Rabe, said that gaining new markets, while also maintaining market access are top priorities within Hortgro. “We have a multi-dimensional team of experts dealing with the ever-increasing demands and compliance issues. Most of this work goes unseen and happen below the radar.

When we have tangible results such as the signing of a new protocol for a new product – in this case pears to China – we have reason to celebrate and thank all the individuals – both in the public and private sector - who have worked tirelessly towards achieving this objective.

“Gaining a market of this nature, is not a silver bullet which will ensure big volumes being exported overnight, nor is it the end of the road. Now the really hard work of developing this market in partnership with the commercial role-players by optimizing the potential towards meaningful volumes to China, starts.”

For media inquiries contact: Jacques du Preez jacques@hortgro.co.za