

Press release: 15 September 2017

Deciduous Fruit Farmers in Western Cape face Water Challenge

Paarl. – As the drought afflicting the Western Cape, and parts of the Eastern Cape, shows no sign of abating, deciduous fruit farmers are considering contingency plans for the coming season. Growing fruit trees is a long term investment with orchards bearing fruit over multiple seasons. It has been one of the driest winters in recent history, with unprecedented low dam levels and pressure on the water infrastructure servicing Cape Town and other municipal areas in the region.

Fruit farmers, who are reliant on irrigation water to produce their crops, apprehensively await rains to fill up their dams. The water situation differs between regions – with some growers reporting enough water to at least see through most of the summer, while others report only fractions of the required amounts of water available for the coming season.

Hortgro recently presented an [irrigation seminar](#) to equip producers with the tools and strategies to mitigate the impact of the drought as best as possible. Since the future scenario of a drying climate requires that all new plantings are highly efficient, the seminar revisited the basic principles of irrigation design and planning. Stages during the season when trees might be more or less sensitive to drought stress or when conditions allow water saving were identified while various practices and technologies to save water such as mulching, restricting irrigation to the root zone, and netting were discussed.

An encompassing drought strategy was presented by a Ceres fruit grower. The strategy involves ranking and allocating water to orchards according to profitability. This would entail optimal irrigation of highly profitable orchards, restriction of water allocation to less profitable orchards and the removal of unproductive orchards. The strategy would be reassessed during monthly water budget meetings.

In line with the above mentioned drought strategy, many growers have brought forward their plans to remove older, less productive orchards over the next couple of years in order to stretch the water they do have as far as possible. Others have decided to remove all the fruit from trees, in anticipation of the fact that they will not be able to raise a crop and keep their trees alive. In the end the allocation of water will be an economical decision with the most productive long term crops getting the advantage over lower yielding orchards or short term crops like onions and potatoes.

Fruit producers, however, are resilient and have been using technology much more actively and effectively in managing their water, irrigation systems and orchards. Water has always been a limited and limiting resource – the past seasons and this coming season will continue to hone growers' skills to make every drop count. A lot can still happen and the situation can quickly change for the better if adequate rain falls, but as it stands at the moment at the tail end of the primary rainfall season in the Western Cape, a decrease in production, exports and foreign earnings, employment and its associated social impact is something that by all likelihood will occur. The magnitude will be determined over the next month and a half.

The flipside of a drought and silver lining for fruit farmers is that the eating quality of fruit under water scarce conditions is usually very good with high sugar levels and good taste.

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Persverklaring: 15 September 2017

Wes-Kaapse sagtevrugteprodusente staan voor wateruitdaging

Paarl. – Die huidige droogte in die Wes-Kaap, en dele van die Oos-Kaap, dwing sagtevrugteboere om gebeurlikheidsplanne vir die komende seisoen in werking te stel.

Die plant van vrugtebome is 'n langtermyn belegging met boorde wat eers teen ongeveer jaar vyf in produksie kom. Die afgelope winterseisoen was een van die droogste winters in etlike jare, met ongekende lae damvlakke wat erge druk op die waterinfrastruktuur van Kaapstad en ander omliggende munisipale gebiede plaas.

Vrugteboere is afhanklik van besproeiingswater vir produksie en wag angstig op goeie lentereëns om hulle damme op te vul. Hortgro se produsente het aangedui dat waterbeskikbaarheid van streek tot streek verskil en selfs binne streke verskil. Sommige vrugteboere sal genoeg water vir die komende seisoen hê, terwyl ander slegs 'n fraksie van die water wat benodig word, het.

Hortgro het onlangs 'n [besproeiingseminaar](#) aangebied om produsente toe te rus met die nodige inligting en strategieë om die impak van die droogte so goed moontlik te versag. Die toekomstige klimaatsvooruitskouings vereis dat alle nuwe boordaanplantings doeltreffend moet wees. Tydens die seminar is die basiese beginsels vir besproeiingsontwerp en beplanning hersien. Die verskillende seisoenstadia wanneer bome moontlik meer of minder sensitief vir droogte is of wanneer omstandighede toelaat dat waterbesparing moontlik is, is geïdentifiseer. Verskillende praktyke en tegnologieë om water te bespaar soos deklaagbewerking, beperking van besproeiing tot die wortelstelsel en die gebruik van nette is bespreek.

'n Omvattende droogte strategie is deur 'n Ceres vrugteprodusent aangebied. Die strategie behels die optimale besproeiing van hoogswinsgewende boorde, beperking van watertoewysing aan minder

winsgewende boorde en die verwydering van onproduktiewe boorde. Hierdie strategie word maandelikse tydens waterbegrotingsvergaderings hersien.

In 'n poging om water te spaar, het heelwat vrugteboere hul ouer en minder produktiewe boorde, wat hulle in elk geval binne die volgende paar jaar sou verwyder, nou reeds uitgehaal. Ander boere het weer besluit om al hulle vrugte van die bome te verwyder in 'n poging om dié bome te red. Uiteindelik sal die toewysing van water 'n ekonomiese besluit wees met die mees produktiewe, langtermyngewasse wat voorkeur kry bo korttermyngewasse soos uie en aartappels.

Vrugteprodusente is egter veerkragtig en gebruik tegnologie baie meer aktief en effektief in die bestuur van hul water, besproeiingstelsels en boorde. Water was nog altyd 'n beperkte en beperkende hulpbron in die Wes-Kaap. Produsente se tegniese vaardighede om elke druppel water te laat tel, sal in die komende seisoen behoorlik getoets word.

Daar word steeds gehoop op goeie lentereën wat die situasie vinnig kan laat verander, maar soos sake nou staan - aan die einde van die primêre reënvalseisoen in die Wes-Kaap - word 'n afname in produksie, uitvoere en buitelandse verdienste verwag. Hierdie situasie sal ook 'n impak op werksgeleenthede en die sosio-ekonomiese omgewing hê. Die volle impak hiervan sal egter eers in die volgende maand en 'n half bepaal kan word. Die keersy van die 'droogtemunt' is dat vrugte se eetgehalte tydens droogtetoestande gewoonlik baie goed is met hoë suikervlakke en goeie smaak.

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