

CHAPTER 2

Recommended support procedures and handling protocols

2. HARVEST

- The time of harvest is very important, as is the physiological maturity at which the fruit is harvested. These standards are summarized in The Department of Agriculture's standards for plums, nectarines and peaches, which is updated annually or contact your exporter for their specified regimes. (Contact Helen Punt at Hortec Services for the determination of physiological maturity).
- Please note that the following, as stated in the Department of Agriculture's guidelines: "Plums or prunes must meet the minimum total soluble content (TSS) of 10%".
- A second quotation is: "The maximum pressure of all cultivars may not exceed 0.5 kg for each 1% increase in the prescribed minimum total soluble solids content (TSS)."
- Avoid fruit that is wet with dew or that has had rain the previous night. Excess moisture may increase the risk of Botrytis and Monilinia infection, and the possibility of bruising because of increased turgor in the fruit.
- It is necessary to harvest certain cultivars, such as African Pride (Sunkiss/Sundew) and Ruby Nel, in the cool hours of the day to avoid causing rub marks on fruit during harvest. The problem of rub marks increases with excess handling.
- Harvest the fruit while it is still cool. During harvest the day temperature increases rapidly and stone fruit must be harvested at a pulptemperature of preferably below 25°C.
- Bins must be clean and sterilized.
- To keep bruising and fingernail marks to a minimum, it is recommended that the people who sort fruit at the bins wear gloves and that their nails are cut short. Further bruising can also be avoided by placing a thick sponge inside the bin into which the pickers empty their picking bags.
- Fruit can be protected against sunburn and high temperature increases by placing water-soaked blankets on top, during harvest in the orchard and while fruit is being transported from the orchard. Another option is fitting the bins with an umbrella for protection against sunburn.
- It is always a good idea to place the bins on the farm (that are awaiting use) in a temporary cool room while the lorry is being loaded with fruit to take to the pack house.