



By Fred Meintjes

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Stargrow Group celebrates milestone

Leading South African fruit business expands as it celebrates 20 years in service of industry



Michiel Prins, chairman of Stargrow

Entering more strategic alliances, extending its international footprint and playing a bigger role in South African transformation projects are just some of the items on the agenda for one of South Africa's leading fruit companies.

The Stargrow Group, based in Stellenbosch, is celebrating 20 years of serving the South African fruit industry. During this period the company has played a huge role in the country's nursery business, established extremely successful breeding programmes for a variety of fruits, managed and commercialised 50 new cultivars on behalf of international and local plant developers, while also commercialising 15 of its own cultivars.

Stargrow cultivars are also now managed by specially appointed agents in 14 countries.

The group has extended its business across Africa where it has been instrumental in turning around agri projects into successful businesses to the

advantage of local communities. It further integrated its business by forming a fruit export division, by setting up alliances with local producers and by establishing a marketing company in Egypt to supply its customers outside the South African season.

"As South Africa expands its exports through new markets and we see the rise of Africa as a major consumer market, there will be greater challenges for South African producers to meet the requirements set by tomorrow's consumers," says Michiel Prins, chairman of the Stargrow Group.

"We have laid the foundations for being a leading player in these developments and we are excited about the future. We share the vision for Africa and transformation in our industry and will increasingly play a greater role in this," he notes.

Stargrow started as a specialist rootstock propagator for deciduous fruit and plays a major role in reducing the shortage of clonal rootstocks in the country.

"In fruit growing the rootstock is the basis of the tree and without good rootstocks the industry is doomed," continues Prins.

Since its establishment, Stargrow has integrated its deciduous and citrus nurseries and has increased the units produced from 100,000 to 15m.

"Our breeding programme for deciduous fruit has been very successful and we are pleased that 15 of our own cultivars have been commercialised locally in South Africa and internationally," he outlines. "Breeding is an international business and these new cultivars have to be tested and managed all over the world. That is why we have appointed agents in 14 countries to manage our own new cultivars through this process. At the same time we are managing and commercialising 50 other cultivars on behalf of other breeders or cultivar developers to move them through the commercialisation process."

He outlines Stargrow's venture into Africa to become involved in project management and advising in order to

turn these projects around, as extremely challenging. "However, we have built up the expertise and we are seeing some major successes," Prins says.

In this respect Stargrow has also become increasingly involved with support for transformation projects in South Africa by assisting with emerging farming projects. "It is exciting to work in this field and we are definitely going to expand our role there," he adds.

According to Prins the Stargrow Groups marketing venture is doing well with business increasing year on year. The establishment of a marketing company in Egypt is seen as a natural extension of this because it allows Stargrow to extend its South African export season and supply customers over a longer period of time.

"This is of great benefit to both our South African producers and those in Egypt working with us," says Prins. "It also keeps our customers in the Middle East happy."