

The Role of Nurseries in Preserving Citrus Biosecurity in Southern Africa

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa is the 2nd largest exporter of fresh citrus in the world, shipping citrus further and to more export destinations than any other country. Sustainable citrus production, as well as the access to markets, are continuously threatened by exotic pests and diseases. When new pests or diseases are found in a production region, these might impact significantly on tree health and production and/or have significant trade implications, ranging from regulated treatments to quarantine measures.

As a worst-case scenario, incursion of the Huanglongbing (Asian Citrus Greening) bacterium and its insect vector the Asian Citrus Psyllid into Florida (USA) is effectively crippling this once thriving citrus industry. Huanglongbing (HLB) is near-impossible to control and countries still free from this dreaded disease, such as South Africa, are taking pre-emptive measures to prevent or delay its incursion and establishment.

Many of the dreaded citrus diseases, including HLB, will not show symptoms on propagation material or young nursery trees, and infected propagation material, especially rooted plants, are the most effective means of (inadvertently) spreading pests and diseases. Moreover, these pests and pathogens are often not restricted to *Citrus* spp. alone and can also be spread on related species.

Role of Nurseries

The roles of nurseries growing citrus and related (mainly Rutaceae) plants are most important in preventing incursion and spread of exotic citrus pests and diseases. Control measures applicable to nurseries include the use of pest- and disease-free propagation material, effective pest and disease control measures during the production and retail stages, and quarantine measures. Nurseries furthermore play a very important role in creating awareness and educating the general public.

To this end, nurseries must be aware of legal restrictions on movement of plant material in South Africa and ensure compliance with all import requirements. In the interest of the nursery sector, potentially affected agriculture and industry sectors and the country as a whole, nurseries must be vigilant and are urged to take action when receiving information that indicates a biosecurity risk or legal transgression.