

Mishkaat Anderson – Culdevco

South African-bred fruit cultivars score high on adaptability



South African fruit cultivars bred by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) demonstrate exceptional adaptability, says Mishkaat Anderson, CEO of its commercialization arm Culdevco, which has introduced over 150 cultivars to over ten countries over the past twenty years. Trials for stonefruit, pome fruit, and certain niche grape varieties are being expanded to diversify Culdevco's market segments, fostering greater collaboration with international stakeholders.

"Culdevco excels particularly in the blush pear and plum varieties, with the top five plum varieties exported from South Africa all originating from the ARC breeding program," she says. "Currently, 50% of the plums that are exported are ARC-bred varieties." Some of the varieties have been commercialized in other countries across Greece, Italy, France, Spain, and Egypt.

Culdevco's shareholders are producer associations, such as Hortgro Pome and Stone, the South African Table Grape Industry, Raisin SA, and the Canning Fruit Producers' Association. "These associations collectively identify the cultivar

requirements for the respective industries and give feedback to the ARC's operational team regarding breeding objectives," she explains. The company further established a non-profit organization called Cultipowered that identifies transformation gaps and supports such initiatives.

Plum field day



Anderson observes that their latest plum, provisionally named PR O6-23 Sanguine Star, is "a succulent, velvety, big cultivar. Sanguine Red is one of the possible names but we are in the process of selecting a more marketable name for this. This selection underwent three years of extensive evaluation and post-storage trials before considering semi-commercialisation."

Right: Attendees at Culdevco's recent field day tasting a new ARC plum (provisionally named PR O6-23) "a succulent, velvety, big cultivar"

During the semi-commercialization phase, samples of the new cultivars are sent to various retailers based on market preferences, as different market segments require specific fruit characteristics.

"ARC-bred cultivars are rigorously tested across various climates and regions by us as well as the independent evaluators Provar," Anderson notes that imported genetics often struggle in South Africa due to adaptability issues, exacerbated by changing climate conditions such as shorter winters and increased rainfall.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in apricots, particularly blush apricots, with the local breeding program aiming to balance taste and blush characteristics. "We remain vigilant and agile to adjust strategies to consumer

preferences and market demands."

Cape Blush (Rosy-Lwazi) blush pear gains traction

From an export perspective, Europe remains the largest market for plums, followed by the UK and the Middle East. Given the logistical challenges faced due to the distance from markets, post-harvest evaluations are crucial.

"Notably, it is ARC-bred varieties such as African Rose and Ruby Sun, African Delight consistently perform well in markets every year," she says.



Mishkaat Anderson, Culdevco CEO

"A new early blush pear named Cape Blush (Rosy-Lwazi), is gaining traction due to its early harvest window and exceptional blush. In contrast, options for European pear growers seeking high-yield blush pears include Cheeky and Rozy-Lwazi. New pear selections are currently in the evaluation phase; keep your eye out and watch the Culdevco space. The ARC has been particularly successful in breeding low-chill apples with Culdevco facilitating apple production in regions such as Limpopo and Namibia."

Culdevco also has promising raisin selections under evaluation for plant breeders' rights.

"The partnership between Culdevco and the ARC has led to the successful commercialization of numerous fruit varieties," she remarks. "This success motivates us to enhance our primary objective of marketing these ARC-bred cultivars. We also incorporate international insights into our breeding strategies to ensure our relevance and foresight regarding industry expectations in the coming years."



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