PESTS

Limited options to manage Myrtle rust in SA

A recently-released scientific paper, "The Myrtle rust pathogen, Puccinia psidii, discovered in Africa", has indicated that options to manage this internationally important alien fungal plant pathogen are relatively limited.

The commercial forestry sector has been concerned after Myrtle rust, native to South America, was discovered on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast by an alert Sappi forester.

The disease has already caused major damage to indigenous and commercial plant life in Australia. "Eradication is unlikely to be effective because rust fungi produce abundant air-borne spores and will be highly dependent on rapid action," stated authors Jolanda Roux, Izette Greyling, Teresa Coutinho, Marcel Verleur and Michael Wingfield. "Selection of resistant plant material will be the most durable approach." The authors said that in addition to probably having substantial negative long-term consequences for commercial forestry and indigenous plant conservation, Myrtle rust was also likely to use SA to move into Africa. – *Staff Reporter*

• *Read the full scientific paper at www.farmersweekly.co.za under "Useful documents".*

ABOVE: Myrtle rust *(Puccinia psidii)* spores infest a *Syzygium jambos* plant in Australia. COURTESY OF PROFESSOR JOLANDA ROUX

CITRUS

SA citrus exports doing well, black spot free

There have been no official notifications of consignments from SA intercepted for the citrus black spot (CBS) in the EU since the beginning of the export window this season, according to the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) of SA.

John Edmonds, CGA information manager, said that of the 40,9 million cartons packed, 30,4 million were already exported this season.

However, Edmonds said SA was not out of the woods yet. Farmers continued to be vigilant in guarding against the disease. "It's quite costly to contain the disease but it has to be done," he said.

Approximately 106,6 million cartons were expected to be shipped by the end of the current season, about 200 000 lower than the original March estimate of 106,8 million. However, this is over three million cartons more than the 103 million of 2012. Edmonds said increases in citrus production and export were due to good weather and rainfall during the growing period.

With the grapefruit season coming to an end, exports are estimated at 16,9 million cartons compared with 13 million last season. Exports for soft citrus are estimated at 7,8 million cartons compared with 7,6 million last season.

Lemon exports are expected to be down from last year's 10,5 million to 10,3 million cartons.

Navels are also expected to take a dip from last year's 24,6 million to 23,9 million cartons, while valencias are expected to increase from 47,2 million in 2012 to 47,7 million this season. – *Peter Mashala*

GOVERNMENT

Farmers give a nod to Masibambisane

Farmer unions are prepared to work with government on the Masibambisane Rural Development Initiative but said much still needed to be done in terms of implementation.

This was after a recent meeting between President Jacob Zuma, who chairs the initiative, and various stakeholders and unions in Pretoria.

Zuma said that he hoped, through the programme, to ensure speedy implementation of agricultural and rural development projects by facilitating public/private partnerships.

The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform said it planned to put one million hectares under production in the next 20 years. They were targeting 550 000ha from land reform beneficiaries and 450 000ha from communal farms in 23 districts in different provinces. Reportedly, R800 million will be needed for the project.

Aggrey Mahanjana, general secretary of African Farmers' Association of South Africa, said the organisation agreed to support the initiative as it would solve the uncoordinated manner in which various government departments operated. Many had programmes aimed at developing smallholder farmers but were working in silos, he said.

TAU SA would also support the programme, its president Louis Meintjes said. But questions regarding the implementation remained unanswered. "We asked what method was used to measure the successes of the programme besides money spent since its inception in 2011. What was the return of investment on the money already spent?" asked Meintjes.

TAU SA also asked exactly how much was going directly to production, consultants and other middlemen. "We don't get any answers," said Meintjes. He said the programme was uncoordinated and lacked direction.

Agri SA economist Dawie Maree said they were positive about the programme and would support it, but added that it would only be successful if it were run correctly and remained free of corruption. – *Peter Mashala*