

Just peachy

Spinneys sources the majority of its stone fruit from South African suppliers. On a recent visit to the country's Western Cape Province, we met with three leading export agencies and their dynamic, passionate growers to find out about their top-quality produce

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Founded in 2011, Stems works with and empowers a close-knit group of 25 growers to ensure that together, they can provide unique stone fruit varieties to premium international retailers such as Spinneys.

Much of the company's investment is placed in a dynamic evaluation programme, which sees them trialling more than 500 new stone fruit varieties, (that includes white- and yellow-flesh nectarines, peaches, flat peaches, plums, apricots and cherries)

in four strategically-placed evaluation orchards in production areas across the Western Cape. These varieties hail mainly from 13 breeders in the US, Spain, France and South Africa.

"Together with our growers and our full time evaluator, we regularly travel abroad to identify potential winners", says managing director Annelie Haumann.

After the importation of the material to South Africa, it needs to go through a quarantine process before it is released to be planted out in our respective experimental orchards. These varieties are then closely monitored; everything from fruit yield and fruit size to eating quality, pest and disease resistance and water usage is taken into consideration, to select only the best varieties for commercial plantings. This process can take anywhere from 5-7 years.

"Innovation is key at Stems – and we're proud to say that through this evaluation programme, we've managed to secure some of the best stone fruit varieties out there," she adds.

Stems latest champion is Boreal – an early-season, white-flesh nectarine. Raymond Koopstad, who farms in partnership with a 4th-generation Stems grower, Peter Wolfaardt has the first commercial planting rights in South Africa for this cultivar.



Stems

< OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: La Vouere farm; Raymond Koopstad; freshly picked nectarines; the Ceres region is a haven for birdlife.

^ THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: New orchards; fresh pickings from the morning harvest; nectarines bound for Spinneys; Stems consolidates all fruit at a central depot – this helps expedite exporting processes; inside one of Stems' pack houses – all fruit is hand selected; the mentorship Peter can offer Raymond is important in ensuring there are new upcoming farmers in South Africa; Peter Wolfaardt.



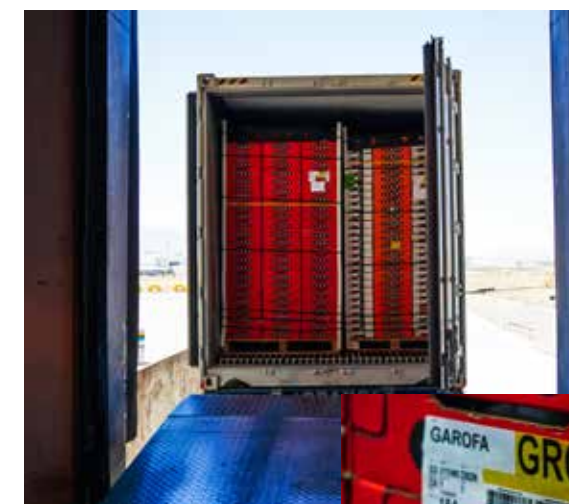
"We'll be the first South African company exporting this variety," says Annelie – "and hopefully you'll see it soon on the Spinneys shelves."

Raymond and Peter's farms are in Ceres – a fertile and strikingly beautiful mountainous valley that's ideal for the production of stone fruit because of its hot summers, extremely cold winters and good water resources. The region almost guarantees good fruit size, sugars and colouration. They both can't speak highly enough about the benefits of working in close collaboration with Stems.

"As growers, we really appreciate the opportunities our partnership with Stems allows," says Raymond. "There was nothing like this in the past."

Peter adds: "New stone varieties are like race horses – they need to be bred properly and will perform at their best if they are well 'groomed' and 'stabled' with the right owner in the right area. Through the Stems evaluation programme, we get clarity in regard to how we need to manage a new variety; what sort of environmental and growing conditions will be required by the variety to ensure optimum results as well as a long shelf life – it is important that the variety will have the ability to travel by sea, as this is a huge priority for our being far from our markets. We are striving as a group toward putting better quality products on the shelves of our clients in comparison to what we've offered previously. We know our premium clients like Spinneys are not interested in the past; they want our innovative future offer!"

For more information, please visit stemsfruit.co.za



DID YOU KNOW?

White-flesh nectarines are sweeter than their yellow-flesh counterparts. They also have a lower acid content.