

Fruit South Africa: Sow the critical seeds of fruit consumption amongst our kids



By [Konanani Liphadzi](#)

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We owe it to our children to advocate for their awareness around nutrition and obesity, and their fruit consumption seems a good place to start. Thankfully, if you held up an orange or an apple in front of a South African child, there's no question that their identification of the fruit would be accurate.



Image via [Fruit SA](#)

Know thy fruit

Though, when Britain recently shone the spotlight on British kids' knowledge about the origins of their local, as well as imported fruit, it was found to be sketchy. According to Juice brand, Honest Kids' poll of 1,000 UK children aged between 6-12 years, 20% didn't know that apples are grown on trees, 60% didn't know the origin of strawberries, 81% didn't know where raspberries (a British fruit) came from and 40% didn't know what an orchard was.

Similarly disconcerting revelations - including that 10% of children in the UK are obese when they start school - are what prompted Max MacGillivray (MD of RedFox in the UK) and Gareth Jones to embark on a three-month motorcycle expedition from the UK through Africa in 2016, visiting a variety of fruit farms and schools. Their journey to educate themselves on the origins of fruit and to later relay acquired knowledge back home, culminated in a final stop in Cape Town, in February 2017. Such advocacy for this critical component of kids' overall health is commendable.

But, where do our South African kids rank when it comes to daily consumption of their required quota of fruit?

According to the 2016 Healthy Active Kids SA Report Card, nearly 23% of our children aged between two and five are either overweight or obese, and 20% are stunted. The report shines the spotlight on a lack of nutrient diversity in children's diets, as a main culprit (where cheap carbohydrates are dominant, and fruit and vegetable consumption lags).

Industry involvement

As a key economic role player within agriculture, the South African fruit industry recognises its vocational responsibility to help advocate for our kids to be educated on the importance of fruit consumption in their diet.



Image via [Fruit SA](#)

The industry is worth more than R44bn; and last year fruit production reached 4.5 million tonnes, with exports to more than 90 countries. This constitutes 50% of all SA's agricultural exports. The much-needed revenue generated through exports has established the fruit industry as a major contributor to South Africa's overall agricultural output (which makes up 2.24% of SA's GDP). Importantly, the industry is therefore also able to put bread on the tables of more than 255,000 South Africans, through direct employment; with 109,000 employed through downstream services and 8,000 through direct service rendering. The fruit industry also has more than 400 BEE enterprises, which occupy more than 14,000ha nationally.

Our fruit industry can, therefore, play a significant role in helping to empower our kids with knowledge around the importance of fruit consumption.

Palatable information

Even in the absence of official statistics, we'd like to believe that South African kids possess above average savvy when it comes to the origin of their fruit. But, perhaps not many are familiar with the journey their fruit meanders, before it finally reaches their fruit bowls. Once the fruit has been harvested on the farm, it's transported to the local packhouse where it's graded according to quality standards, and then packed.

The fruit is then kept in a cold store, until it's ready to be transferred to a distribution centre, where another rigorous inspection process follows. It's then transported to the respective supermarkets for consumers to purchase. And the trucks transporting the fruit are required to adhere to stringent temperature controls at all times, to ensure quality compliance.

It's bite-size chunks of information like this that ultimately pertain to the agricultural sector, that could gradually pique the

interest of our kids. The younger kids are when they learn about the origins of their food and its nutritional value, the more of a chance they have at good health and relevant savvy later on.

In 2014, food and nutrition education became compulsory in the UK's school curriculum, for five to fourteen-year-olds. They also did this to complement the work that was already underway, to improve the food prepared in their school kitchens.

Start teaching our kids about agriculture

In South Africa, a more robust collaboration between government and agriculture will help to accelerate the process of building within our kids an affinity with agriculture, through education. Who knows, this may just serve as an antidote later on in their lives, to the prevailing myths that currently divert our youth from opting for a career in agriculture.

As for the required positive shift in the agricultural sector's growth trajectory, the answer may just lie partly in attracting more of these young minds. Farmers globally are ageing - with the average age of a South African farmer being 62 years. This, while youth unemployment continues to soar. And, while the Agbiz/IDC Agribusiness Confidence Index has shown a worrying decline to 48 in the third quarter - the weakest since 2016 - the sector does still hold considerable potential.

Therefore, we look forward to working more closely with the government and our various stakeholders, as well as with schools, to help empower our kids on the critical topic of fruit consumption.

ABOUT KONANANI LIPHADZI

Dr Konanani Liphadzi is the CEO of Fruit SA, a non-profit organisation that represents the voice of SA's fresh fruit industry.

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