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## EKM EXPORTS Multi-Million Rand **Investments**



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EKM EXPORTS

## Multi-Million Rand Investments for SA Fruit Exporter

PRODUCTION: Karl Pieterse

With celebrity marketing campaigns, a sparkling new pack house facility and a quality product that is in demand all over the world, right now is a good time for leading SA fruit business, EKM Exports.

South Africa's fruit export business is hugely important to the country's economy. The country is one of the world's largest exporters of citrus fruits and SA products are enjoyed all over the world. Exporting brings much needed cash into the economy and trading in international markets supports many jobs. It's essential that South Africa continues to invest in such an important business and helps to grow it so that people can benefit from the nation's fertile land.

One company that has continued to drive the fruit export business forward is Gauteng-based EKM Exports, one of the country's leading

fruit growers and exporters. Now exporting around three million cartons of carefully grown SA produce every year, EKM is marketing aggressively in foreign markets, taking advantage of favourable foreign trade conditions and also looking to the continent for further growth.

"Big percentages of our volume goes into Europe. Europe is attractive for all exporters as they take Class 1, Class 2 and a whole different range of sizes. After that, it's the Far East (mainly China), the Middle East (mainly Bangladesh) and then Canada," explains EKM Director, Brendon Kruger.

"We're interested in Africa – that's a market that hasn't been tapped into

yet from our side. Angola, Zambia, Senegal, Nigeria and similar markets are attractive for us."

Unlike many other companies, the downward trend in the currency market, seeing the Rand reach record lows against the Euro and Dollar, has seen the export market become hugely attractive to foreign buyers.

"For us, in the export market, it's been positive," says Kruger. "Obviously things get more expensive for the farmers; things like chemicals, but overall it's more positive than negative for us. For the farmers that have the quality to export – they're benefitting a lot."

### GROWING ORGANICALLY

After its formation in 1999, EKM has grown significantly and now employs more than 400 people across all operations. The company only sources fruit from reliable suppliers who hold quality and professionalism in the highest regard.

In order to continue growing and developing relationships with important existing and potential customers, the company started a marketing campaign in 2014, using a South Africa cricket legend as the spearhead. Currently recognised as one of the greatest batsmen of all time, playing for the Royal Challenges Bangalore in India, De Villiers in the face of the GOGO citrus brand and helps drive business in Asian markets.

"It's definitely a positive thing in the market, especially in places like India and Bangladesh," says Kruger. "We are going to carry on with this campaign and push it harder than we have before. We met AB and he's a businessman as well as a cricket player. He's not going to play cricket until he's 80, one day he has to retire so he's keeping his options open. He sees an opportunity in our business so it's a win-win. The GOGO badge is on his bat in the IPL and we use him with photoshoots, promotions and advertisements. If we go to India with our farmers to meet clients and he is there, we can take him to meet them so it's about building relationships and we plan to push that much harder this year."

India has been identified as a key target market for SA fruit exporters who are reportedly expecting to see a significant increase in the volumes of fruit available for export over the medium to long-term.

The CGA said last month: "India is seen as offering huge potential. With present volumes of about 9,000 pallets the goal is to increase this volume by tenfold during the next ten years. Most players in the Indian market believe that this is possible."

CGA CEO Justin Chadwick spoke to Asiafruit at Fresh Produce India and said: "In order to make that happen role-

players from Southern Africa will need to understand the dynamics of the market."

EKM certainly understands the market and its success at home, farming in South Africa, is matched in its chosen export locations. 'Our aim is to make high quality fruit available to everyone, everywhere' is the one of the company's slogans and quality forms the base of the next planned major investment.

"The next stage for us is that we want to have all of our farms under protective netting so that we can bolster our volumes with Super Class 1 fruits as markets will pay a premium for that quality. It's about quality over quantity; we don't want to buy more farms – we want to get all of our farms under nets," explains Kruger.

### FRUIT IN THE FAMILY

EKM was founded by entrepreneur Eben Kruger (Brendon's father) and, using his passionate approach to business, he has been the catalyst behind the development of EKM and the industry more widely.

"He is the founder and CEO of the GOGO group and of EKM Exports. He started exporting for a few farmers in the area and later he created a brand. Instead of exporting for five, six or seven different farmers, he created a brand that was attractive so that the farmers could build a name in the markets that their exporting to," explains Brendon. "We now have five farmers that are the best in the business and we all have the same way of thinking and the same vision for the brand. EKM Exports handles all export activity and all the marketing and we've been growing every year – it started with the cold room and now it's the pack house and next we'll be putting nets over all of our citrus."

Brendon's uncle is also involved with EKM and the GOGO brand as a leading grower. This family approach to business has allowed the company to remain true to its values and, leading by example, Eben Kruger has shared his drive and determination. "Each

and every member of the team has a fire burning deep within his core. A desire to exceed expectations. A desire to innovate. A desire to succeed," the company says. "We have a close-knit, streamlined team. Each of our markets has dedicated personnel enabling 24 hour communication and personal, transparent relationships."

Today, EKM's product portfolio includes the GOGO citrus range (Navels, Navellates, Cambria, Midnights, Delta Seedless, Lemons, Grapefruit and Nova), a plethora of table grape varieties and also many different types of apple.

### NEW PACK HOUSE


The most recent investment for EKM is a brand new pack house, located alongside the company's existing cold room infrastructure, allowing for smooth, efficient and streamlined movement, prep and storage of goods.

The RXX million investment is a statement of intent from EKM, signalling ambition for the future.

"The pack house was built for the GOGO group which is a group of five farmers. We built one centralised pack house next to our cold room facility. It benefits us as everyone is using the same pack house so the quality is standardised. It makes packing orders for clients easier and quicker – if a client is ordering so many cases of a certain class, we can pack it exactly how they want it. The pack house can pack around 60 tons of fruit each hour," Kruger says.

"We're the only inland cold-room facility in South Africa that can do cold treatment and phytosanitary inspections for China, Taiwan, India and all these markets that require special phytosanitary inspections. In the past, any grower or exporter would have to send containers of fruit to the port and at the port they would do the inspections and this caused congestion and delays as everyone is harvesting at the same time and everybody is sending their fruit to the port at the same time. Now that we have the pack house right next to the cold-room, we are very efficient."

"The fruit goes straight from the pack house into the cold-room and we load the containers, seal them, and the next time the container is opened is by the client overseas," he adds.

This is an extremely exciting time for EKM Exports and the GOGO brand. With its marketing efforts helping to gain further traction in the Indian and Bangladeshi markets, and investments in infrastructure in South Africa making operations more efficient than ever, this is a business that is set for the future and one which has positioned itself extremely strongly as it continues to grow. 


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