

Reducing food waste by implementing best practices across food chains

A little over 100 plant scientists, plant pathologists, postgraduate students and industry experts converged at Skukuza Camp, Kruger National Park, on 28 May for the six-day International Symposium on Postharvest Pathology which will see local and international researchers present thought-provoking new insights into disease control strategies to address the challenge of food waste after harvesting.



Postharvest Pathology Symposium to address food waste

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The opening address by Professor Frans Swanepoel set the tone for the Symposium, contending that ‘science can drive Africa’s agricultural transformation.

Not only does Africa hold half of the world’s arable land, but “seven out of ten people living in sub-Saharan Africa are farmers – compared to that of the United States, where the ratio is two out of a hundred,” explained Professor Swanepoel.

“With the correct approach, agriculture can provide nutritious food for all and generate decent incomes, while supporting people-centred rural development and protecting the environment,” he added.

Despite global increases in yields and food production, a vast amount of food is wasted along the food chain such as during:

- **Production** - through yield loss, pests, and diseases;
- **Harvesting** - through poor handling practices and rigid quality standards which can result in fresh produce being discarded due to pests, diseases or high-quality standards;



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- **Packing** - through rejection of produce not complying with set quality standards, pesticide residues detected, or decay

development and physiological disorders as well as other quality related aspects associated with packaging material used;

- **Storage and distribution** - through decay related to transportation and or storage time or poor facility sanitation standards and ineffective cold chain management;

- **Sales** - if a box of fruit sold at a fresh produce market or at a retailer and contains a few rotten fruit within the box, the entire box or even an entire pallet of fruit can be discarded. This means the farmer makes a loss and food is wasted;

- **Consumer plate** - food is also wasted at household levels.

“We can reduce food waste by implementing best practices at all levels across the food value chains and through processing, by converting the product for animal feed or, if not regarded as being fit for human consumption, converted to either biogas or compost,” said University of Pretoria-based Professor Lise Korsten, co-director of the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE) and chairperson of the Fourth International Postharvest Pathology Symposium.

During the symposium, researchers and industry experts will debate and explore interventions to eliminate plant diseases, to deal with the growing burden of food decay that leads to enormous amounts of waste globally.

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