

IFPA Conference provides fresh perspective on fresh produce industry

The International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) brought together 260 stakeholders from the fresh produce supply chain for its Southern Africa conference from August 1 to 3 at the Century City Conference Centre in Cape Town. Over three days, ten speakers challenged conventional thinking with their unique viewpoints on a variety of thought-provoking issues.



IFPA CEO Cathy Burns took the stage for a State of the Industry address.

"The challenges facing our industry have never been stronger," said Burns, citing inflation, war, climate crises, energy shortages, and trade barriers. "All of these factors can be relentless. Yet, despite this, our future has never been set up for us to make more of an impact. Our time is now. We are a great industry."

"Fresh produce accounts for about 7% of the world's total exports. Despite the small percentage, fresh produce is a high-value crop. In 2022, exports represented \$1.3t in revenues globally. The South African fruit and vegetable market is predicted to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6.9% by 2028," said Burns.

A lot of innovation, investment and momentum are seen around sustainability, technology

"Regenerative agriculture was recognised as one of the world-changing ideas this year. Food waste and loss is an area the industry continues to take head-on."

"An estimated \$600bn worth of food is lost during or after harvest. Two-thirds of this food is still edible but does not meet customers' standards regarding size, appearance, superficial differences or out-of-date packaging."

"Around the world, consumers often throw out food unnecessarily as they believe that the best-before date refers to the last day they can use the food instead of referring to the freshness of the product," Burns said.



Fresh produce conference to transform challenges into opportunities

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"This has spurred several UK retailers to remove best-before-date labels from fresh produce and left it up to the consumer to decide whether or not that product is good to eat — part of a UK effort to reduce food waste by 50 per cent by 2030," continued Burns.

"In South Africa, about 10 million tonnes of food goes to waste yearly, with fruit, vegetables and cereals representing 70%. This primarily occurs early in the supply chain."

"On the retail side, it is estimated that \$400bn in food is wasted each year, representing as much as 7% of grocery sales.

"Like sustainability, agricultural technology continues to see steady innovation and investment. Last year alone, investors pumped \$51.7bn into agri-food tech, an 85% increase from the prior year," said Burns.

"Generative AI will be a game-changer that will rewrite the rules of business and customer engagement. If you haven't already, I would strongly encourage you to learn more about it."

Pharm on the farm

Many organisations continue to struggle with attracting, developing, and retaining talent. The reality is that no amount of mechanisation will replace the need for a talented human workforce.

While the World Health Organization (WFO) recommends 400 grams of fruits and vegetables per person daily, the reality is that consumption sits at 267 grams daily. There is a global burden of unhealthy diets. Three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, while 11 million estimated global deaths are attributable to dietary risk factors.

"One of the lessons learned after three years of Covid is that consumers came to deeply understand the connection between the foods they eat and how they feel. As more consumers heal their relationship with food, it's becoming evident that the solution to many of our health challenges is not IN the P-H-A-R-M but ON the F-A-R-M."

"IFPA is not in this to simply change the game. We are in this to change the world. And together with our members, we will," Burns concluded.