

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



JUNE 2026



CULTIVAR NEWS AND INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

MARIBELLE (LOLA®)

SAPO welcomed Jan van Ingen from TreeQuattro to South Africa in mid-March to explore further opportunities for Maribelle (Lola®) within local production systems.

Maribelle is a fresh-market apple from the Netherlands that produces large fruit with an attractive pink blush and a sweet, juicy flavour. Harvesting at the tail end of the Golden Delicious season, it presents an interesting replacement option for growers considering orchard renewal. The cultivar is also known for its strong productivity, good shelf life, and low susceptibility to scab, mildew, and fruit tree canker. [Click here to learn more!](#)



MAGIC STAR®

SAPO hosted a field day in Ceres and travelled through the Langkloof in April, engaging with producers and nurseries where Magic Star® has already been planted. The discussions generated positive feedback and growing interest in the variety, with increasing confidence in its potential among local growers.

Magic Star® is a well-coloured, large-sized apple with a crisp eating quality, scab resistance, and excellent storage potential. The variety is already being marketed in China and India and is available in supermarkets across Europe and the UK, demonstrating strong international market appeal. [Click here to learn more!](#)



CAPE GREEN™

Evaluation of the Cape Green™ apple cultivar continues in South Africa as growers and industry stakeholders assess its suitability within local production systems.

Originating from Belgium, Cape Green™ is a fresh-market apple characterised by its green skin colour, balanced flavour, firm texture, and good storage potential. The cultivar is harvested around the third week of March in the Agter-Witzenberg region and has shown encouraging productivity. [Click here to learn more!](#)



RYB SELECT™

We are pleased to announce that the RYB Select™ trademark has been officially approved in South Africa, with the registration certificate issued in May 2026.

The trademark has been registered in Class 31 (agricultural and horticultural products) and Class 44 (agricultural, horticultural, and plant-related services).



PROTOCOL: RYB SELECT™
[Budwood harvesting protocol](#)



ORDER POME AND STONE PLANT MATERIAL

Orders for winter plant material are open with these trees intended for planting in 2026.



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LEAFROLL TESTING COMPLETED AND PREMIUM RAISIN VARIETIES CERTIFIED

The annual Leafroll testing season was completed at the end of May 2026 for all SAPO-controlled varieties. Test results have been submitted to Plant SA, and the relevant Foundation and Mother Block statuses are currently being updated accordingly.

Furthermore, all premium raisin grape varieties, including Selma Pete, Merbein Seedless, and Flame Seedless, have obtained certified status, emphasizing SAPO's commitment to supplying registered nurseries with virus-free, certified plant material of the highest quality.

Plant material orders for SAPO's raisin grape varieties have exceeded 2 million units for the current season, highlighting the continued growth and demand for raisin grape establishment across the industry.



MERBEIN SEEDLESS

A productive seedless raisin grape cultivar valued for its early maturity, reliable yields, rapid drying, and rain tolerance.



SUNDOWNER

Medium-sized berries with a sweet flavour and excellent suitability for high-quality sun-dried raisins.



SELMA PETE

An early-ripening, high-yielding, seedless raisin grape cultivar with excellent drying characteristics and uniform berry size.



SUNMUSCAT

This is a proven alternative variety to sultana that is highly fruitful with a muscat flavour. Moderated to high yield. Shows some rain tolerance.

ORDER GRAPEVINE PLANT MATERIAL



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GRAPEVINE ELISA TESTING SEASON UNDERWAY

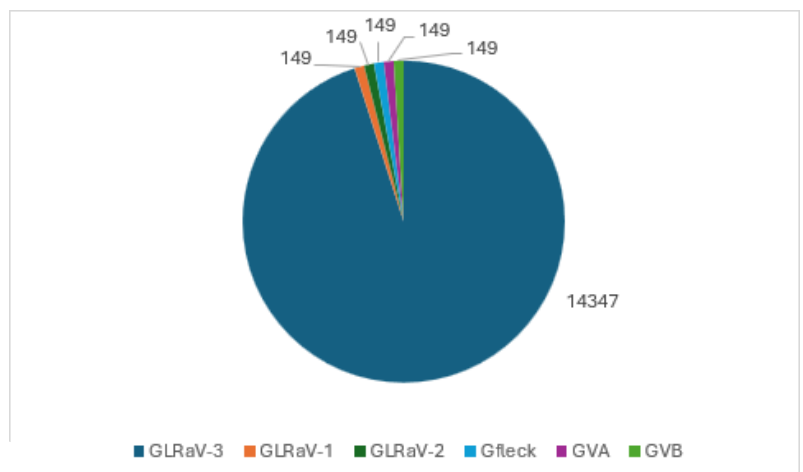
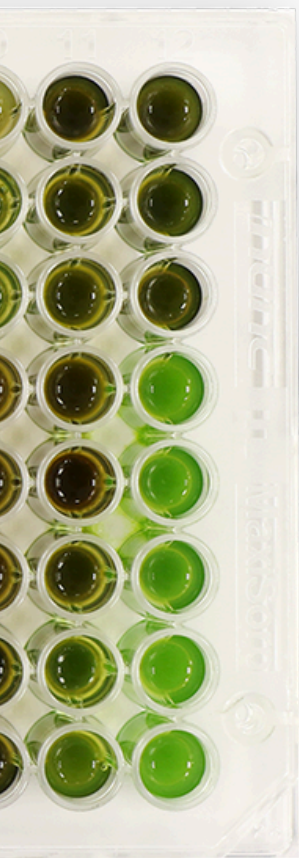
The 2026 grapevine ELISA testing season commenced in March and concluded at the end of May.

Testing during this period focuses primarily on Grapevine Leafroll-Associated Virus 3 (GLRaV-3) in accordance with the requirements of the certification scheme.

As part of the scheme, plant material in the nucleus tunnels is also tested for a range of additional viruses on a five-year cycle. These include:

- Grapevine Leafroll-Associated Virus 1 (GLRaV-1)
- Grapevine Leafroll-Associated Virus 2 (GLRaV-2)
- Grapevine Fleck Virus (GFkV)
- Grapevine Virus A (GVA), associated with Stem Pitting and Shiraz Disease
- Grapevine Virus B (GVB), associated with Corky Bark

The graph below illustrates the total number of samples tested for each grapevine virus during the current testing cycle.



RECENT EVENTS AND PARTICIPATION



SAPO had the opportunity to present at the **CFG Producers Forum** on 17 April 2026, where Elsa Muller and Rudi Vos shared insights on cultivar development and plant improvement with producers. The session provided a valuable platform for discussion and knowledge sharing around topics that continue to shape the future of the deciduous fruit industry.

Elsa Muller recently attended the **GoReefers Logistics event** in Paarl, themed "Certainty in an Uncertain World", where industry stakeholders gathered to discuss the challenges and realities currently facing South Africa's export sector.

Photo: Luan Grundlingh with Elsa



Rudi Vos and Tshotsho Asandiswa attended **Caledon Valley Nursery's Open Day** in May, joining approximately 50 industry members. The event provided a valuable platform for knowledge sharing, industry collaboration, and networking, highlighting the importance of ongoing engagement across the deciduous fruit value chain.

SAPO team members attended and participated in various activities at the **Hortgro Technical Symposium 2026**, including the Pome and Stone Fruit Field Days. The programme provided valuable insight into topics such as orchard management, rootstocks, plant improvement, certification, sustainability, plant health, biosecurity, and emerging technologies. Elsa Muller also served as session chair for the biosecurity discussion, "Shields Up: Rethinking Biosecurity in High-Value Fruit Crops." The symposium offered an excellent opportunity for learning, knowledge sharing, and engagement with growers and industry stakeholders from across the deciduous fruit sector.

Photos, clockwise from top left: Wendy Bailey and Gray-Lee Carelse; Elsa Muller, Elsa with Dr Maanda Rambuali; Tshotsho Asandiswa and Brandon Klem; Rudi Vos with Jason Minnaar (TopFruit), Mishkaat Anderson (Culdevco), Annemarie van der Westhuizen (VitroplantSA), and Henriette Gresse (VitroplantSA); In discussion at the Stone Fruit Field Day.



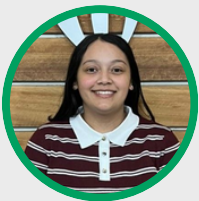
INTERNATIONAL VISIT HIGHLIGHTS VIRUS TESTING AND ELIMINATION PRACTICES

Wendy Bailey and Marizanne Horn (TCF) visited Cornell University and the United States Department of Agriculture Quarantine Station in March to learn more about their virus testing and virus elimination programmes.



The visit highlighted the extensive use of PCR, and Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) technologies for virus detection, as well as the rigorous post-treatment monitoring of plant material following virus elimination. Both organisations utilise in vitro based tissue culture virus elimination techniques, with Cornell incorporating heat and cold treatments, while the USDA primarily uses heat treatment. The visit provided valuable insight into international best practices in plant health, certification, and the production of high-quality propagation material.

Welcome to the SAPO Team



Heidi Lee Nicholls recently joined SAPO as Assistant Plant Improvement Technician. She holds a National Diploma in Agriculture: Plant Production from the Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute and has a strong passion for horticulture and plant production. Heidi brings enthusiasm, dedication, and a positive attitude to her role, and we look forward to her contribution to SAPO's plant improvement programme.



Nicola Coetzee recently joined the SAPO Laboratory team as a Laboratory Technician. She holds a BHSc in Medical Laboratory Science from CPUT and an MSc in Medical Virology from Stellenbosch University. With four years' experience as a Research Assistant in the Division of Medical Virology at Stellenbosch University, Nicola brings strong molecular biology expertise and a passion for scientific research to her new role.



Jandré Ehlers will join SAPO as Plant Production Manager on 6 July. With a BSc in Horticulture and an MSc in Agricultural Economics, Jandré brings a strong combination of technical expertise and industry insight to the role. His experience spans plant improvement, tissue culture, virus elimination, cultivar commercialisation, and laboratory and quarantine management. Passionate about plant health, innovation, and sustainable production systems, Jandré is committed to strengthening the availability of high-quality plant material and supporting the continued growth and competitiveness of South Africa's deciduous fruit industry.

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