



## REVIEW OF THE CARTON ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

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### Background

Soon after the deregulation of the citrus industry, growers started to incur losses in the market due to the deterioration of packing material and poor palletisation practices in packhouses. During a Citrus Marketing Forum meeting in 2007, CRI was requested to put structures in place to address the problem and get discipline back into the postharvest industry. This led to the formation of the CRI Postharvest Technical Forum (CRI-PTF) with its membership groupings, including the Packaging Working Group (PWG).

The manufacturers who supply cartons for export citrus became members of the PWG on a voluntary participation basis, with Dawid Groenewald as the convenor. The most important task of the PWG was to compile a full set of specifications for cartons and pallets, and palletisation protocols for the full range of export cartons. The "Packaging Material Specifications and Palletisation Protocols" document was compiled and sent out in January 2008, thereafter it was updated on an annual basis and sent out during January or February each year to all the relevant industry role players.

### Carton Accreditation System

In 2008 the Exporters Technical Panel (ETP) and citrus packhouses requested the implementation of a carton accreditation system, similar to what has been in place during the regulated era. ***The initial aim of the accreditation system was to protect growers against losses in the market.*** The members of the PWG agreed on voluntary participation in an accreditation system, with CRI providing facilitation support. Sappi offered to test the cartons at their cost. Testing of the cartons started in 2009 on a scheduled basis, and was conducted in addition to manufacturers' own testing.

Since there was an ongoing interest for some growers to order cheaper cartons that did not meet the specifications, the carton accreditation system was amended in 2016 to allow for freedom of choice in a free market environment. It was agreed by the members of the PWG to use a quality mark,

"Manufactured to Packaging Working Group Specifications", to be printed onto cartons that comply with the minimum specifications. Non-compliant cartons were not tested by Sappi and had no quality mark printed on them.

### Need for change

The accreditation system initially played an excellent role in supporting a focus on improved quality of packing material. However, the system later became redundant for many reasons, including the following:

- It is a system without accountability. No action whatsoever could be taken against non-conforming practices and operators.
- An erroneous impression was developed that CRI was acting as if it was a regulator and not the facilitator. CRI has no regulating authority.
- CRI was at risk if it took actions that damaged a PWG member.
- CRI is not an accreditation body.
- Specification of the paper types to be used in the board combination (virgin liner and semi-chemical fluting) was prescriptive, was seen as hampering innovation, and could potentially be considered anti-competitive.
- There was very little evidence that growers used minimum specifications when ordering cartons. Some growers even strongly opposed the carton accreditation system.
- The carton accreditation system failed to keep non-compliant cartons out of the market.
- The system was fraught with loopholes such that it offered little to no protection from non-compliance or abuse.
- There was a great deal of subjectivity in the processes.
- Even the box compression test (BCT) is only an indicator of carton strength at a specific point in time, under specific conditions, with no indication of the durability of the strength.

The carton accreditation system therefore was no longer effective or appropriate in the form it had evolved into and CRI was brought into a compromised position due to its involvement.

### The review process

The CRI Board directed CRI to review the carton accreditation system and to determine the nature of CRI's future involvement. A first review engagement with the PWG took place in December 2022. At a follow-up meeting with the PWG in January 2023, the members agreed to engage in the review process, with the support of a facilitator. Dr Hoppie Nel was engaged to facilitate the review.



The review process included obtaining legal advice and consultation with specialists in the field of paper and carton manufacturing. Comparable systems operated in other industries were also investigated. All members of the PWG were individually consulted.

### Changes to the accreditation system

The review process culminated in the following changes to the system:

- “Specifications” and “protocols” became “guidelines”.
- The accreditation system and the quality mark are replaced by guidelines.
- The document, “Packaging Material Specifications and Palletisation Protocols”, became the “CRI Packaging Guidelines”.
- **All the technical information in the document will remain unchanged.**
- The system is not presented as an accreditation system.
- The PWG will continue to function on the basis of voluntary association.

If citrus packhouses want to test their cartons, they can arrange testing at a facility of their choice, for their account. However, Sappi agreed to carry on testing cartons for CRI at their costs, but this will not be for accreditation purposes, but for monitoring purposes to ensure that the deterioration of the packing material is not taking place. PWG members conduct extensive testing of their own. The PWG members have indicated a willingness to continue voluntary participation in the PWG.

### Role of CRI in packaging

CRI will continue promoting the development and implementation of best packaging options and packing and handling related practices for the industry.

CRI will continue to engage with the carton manufacturers regarding process and quality control, to give the industry assurance that good quality cartons continue to be manufactured.

CRI will continue evaluating new packaging innovation options in cooperation with the paper and carton manufacturers.

CRI will monitor the industry packaging performance along the value chain and give feedback to role players and provide a technical support function to all role players. The monitoring function will include the compilation of a database to be able to identify any deterioration of packing material in the citrus industry.

### Responsibility of growers

In essence, very little has changed. All the technical information in the CRI Packaging Guidelines is unchanged and remains applicable. Growers will always have access to good quality cartons and have freedom to choose their suppliers and specific cartons. The choice of carton manufacturer and carton specification always was in the hands of the grower and remains so.

***Growers are advised to specify the quality of the cartons ordered, preferably in writing. Growers can specify the quality of their cartons according to CRI Packaging Guidelines. This includes the dimensions, BCT values, paper types in the board combination and the position of the ventilation holes. Growers should always seek written assurance from their suppliers that the cartons are fit for purpose, particularly in terms of carton strength appropriate for the intended export market.***

Agree in writing who is taking the risk in case of carton failure, especially when new paper combinations or carton types are used in experimental consignments.

If in doubt, check the quality of the cartons before packing. Send a sample of five cartons to a facility of choice for testing.

The packaging manufacturing and supply business is highly competitive with very professional, experienced and knowledgeable role players servicing the southern African citrus industry. To stay in business in a very competitive market, each carton manufacturer has to be able to supply their clients with suitable quality cartons. Carton quality is in any case always a matter between supplier and customer, and the guidelines continue to provide both parties with a valuable reference point.

If you have any concerns or questions, please contact Hannes Bester at 083 325 8379 or [hannesbester@cri.co.za](mailto:hannesbester@cri.co.za)