

Nut production to double due to high demand

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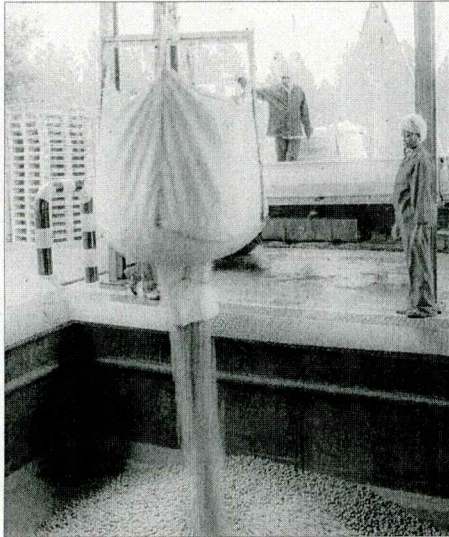
MACADAMIA nut producers, Green Farm Nut Company (GFNC), predict that production will double in the next five to seven years in the country because of worldwide demand.

"We are not as big as the sugar cane industry yet, but we are growing very fast. There is a huge demand for macadamia nuts and we export our product to South America and Europe. Because this is a very scarce product it is very profitable," Alex Whyte, GFNC's sales and marketing executive for Europe, Middle East and Africa, said. He said a farmer could get \$17 000 (R246 340) a ton for the macadamia nuts.

South Africa was the world leader in producing the nuts – contributing 27 percent of the global output. However, the drought had negatively affected production this year.

"About 10 years ago the doctors were saying nuts can make you fat, but that has changed... We have seen a worldwide shift and people are eating more nuts as compared to a few years ago," he said.

According to Montagu Dried Fruit & Nuts, the listed benefits for macadamia nuts are that they assist with weight loss,



Green Farms, a producer of macadamia nuts, says South Africa is the leading producer in the industry. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

help alleviate arthritis symptoms, help to control high blood pressure and promote brain

health. Macadamia nuts are quickly becoming an important crop in South Africa and possi-

bly the fastest growing tree crop industry in the country.

"Up until last year, South Africa had taken over as the number one producer of macadamia nuts. We produced 27 percent of the world's production with Australia second with 24 percent. However, the drought has affected our production in the current year and we anticipate that the production will be 30 percent less compared to 2015. Australia might return to the number one spot again," Whyte said.

GFNC had three factories: in Vhembe, Nelspruit and Ramsgate. Whyte said GFNC produced and marketed 25 percent of the local market's output.

The Department of Agriculture said a good macadamia tree could produce nuts for 40 years. The trees required a hot subtropical climate without much humidity. In South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo were ideal areas.

The department said about 3 000 new job opportunities had been created on macadamia farms over the last decade and another 1 000 jobs in cracking facilities in the country.

There were close to 1 000 farmers involved in growing the nuts and the annual production was more than 29 000 tons.