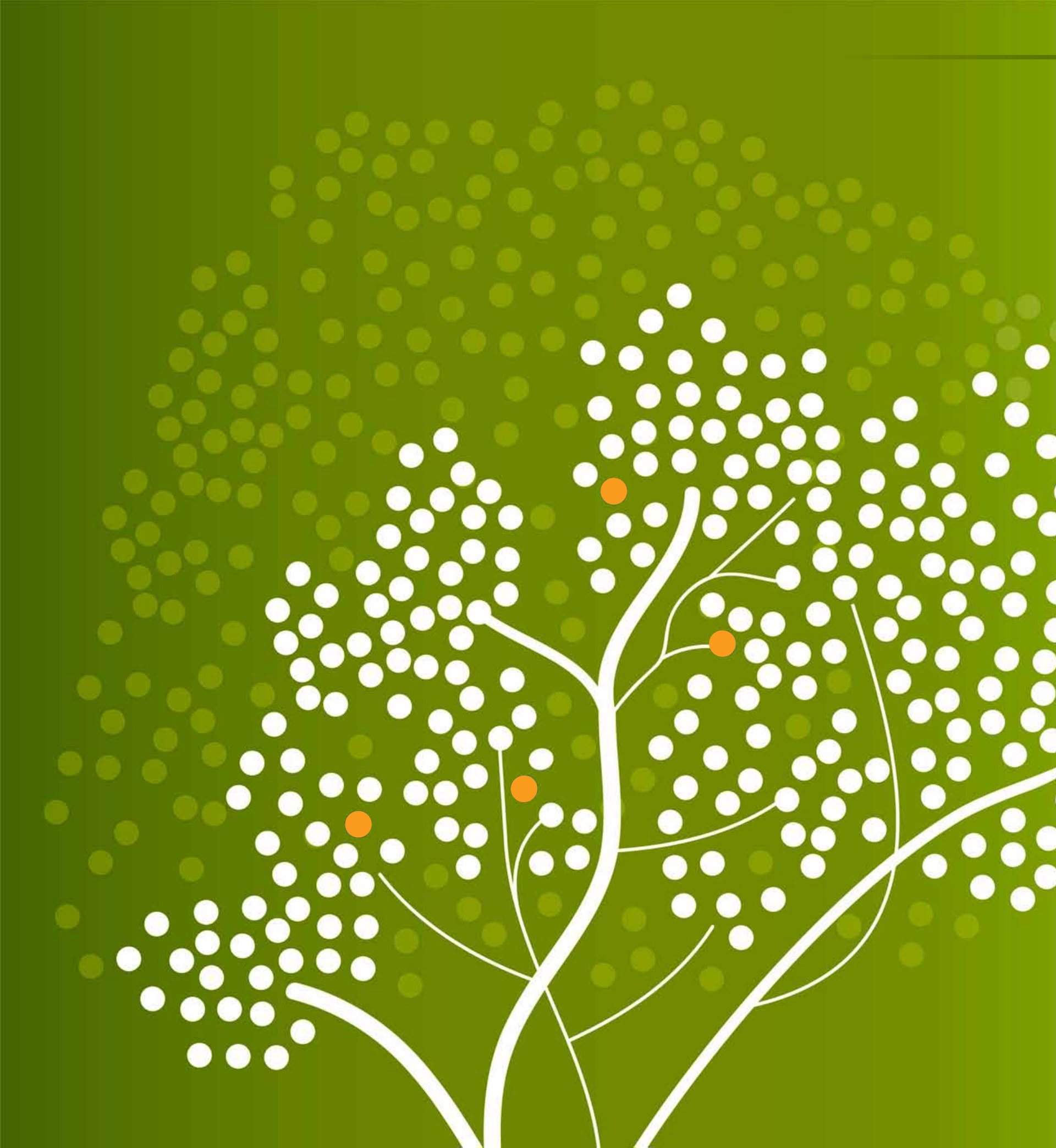


# Sustainable horticulture

Sam Howard speaks to Willie Wood, senior sustainable horticulture manager at Chingford Fruit Limited, to find out how partnerships with producers and growers worldwide are impacting the products found on UK supermarket shelves



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Part of the AG Thames group of companies, Chingford Fruit Limited (CFL) was founded in 1966. Over the last 44 years, AG Thames has continued to grow through the acquisition of companies within key areas of its business. The group now employs 480 people with offices in South Africa, Italy, Spain, New Zealand and Chile.

Climate change, water scarcity, over-exploitation of resources and unsustainable farming practices all seriously threaten our food security and the long-term sustainability of agricultural production.

By sourcing with integrity and forming partnerships with growers at farm level, CFL aim to raise both environmental and social standards and move towards genuine sustainability. In practice this means working with growers to initiate change at farm level and foster greater consideration for the economic, environmental and social impacts of their activities.



According to studies by Pimental (1999) and Granatstein & Kumpferman (2006), the human population is adding more than a quarter of a million people daily and is set to grow to 12 billion within the next 40 years. The production and supply of sufficient food worldwide will therefore become an increasingly challenging task.

To all intents and purposes, for global food supply to meet this dramatically increasing human population the dependence on land-based agriculture can only intensify. Currently more than 99 per cent of food comes from these systems; the balance (less than one per cent) from the oceans and fresh water systems. In short, farming is the primary means of converting solar energy into food for humankind and no other approach is likely to replace it.

Agricultural productivity and food supply are directly dependent upon the adequate availability and supply of natural resources such as fertile land, fresh water, energy and natural biodiversity.

These critical natural resources, and the complex natural cycles and processes that maintain them, are under increasing pressure and threat from agricultural production itself. Current agricultural practices enable increasing productivity and output, but at the expense of the very same natural resource base that this productivity and output is ultimately dependent upon.

This amounts to a grave challenge for humanity: how to increase agricultural output while at the same time preserving and restoring the underlying natural resource base that enables it.

Farms need to function in such a way that output is maintained or enhanced over the long term without the depletion of the natural resources





that are essential to achieving this productivity. Concurrent with this is the realisation that current agricultural practices are not likely to achieve this. In other words, there is a need to achieve a shift from the current non-sustainable modes of operation to sustainable agricultural production methods.

As a dedicated and significant supplier of citrus, top fruit, stone fruit and kiwi fruit, CFL must ensure it is always in a position to proactively understand

and effectively respond to the vision, values, direction, drivers and priorities that define its customer's own strategy as it evolves and is expressed over time.

Over the course of the last year, CFL has developed and is successfully driving a very clear and strong strategy with achieving sustainable supply chains as the central theme. "Our strategy has been developed in



a manner that reflects the business's desire to translate our customer's aspirations and needs into a robust strategy that the company can own," explains Willie Wood. "It is aimed at equipping CFL to become leaders in the field of global sustainable fruit supply chains."

Within the Chingford organisation, the term sustainability is no longer a soft subject but has been encoded into its procurement policies and practices and will increasingly be shaping the make-up, characteristics and performance of its entire supply chain.

In the last 12 months CFL has heavily invested in internal expertise to support its suppliers and growers. The new sustainable horticulture team is aligned directly to its global top fruit, citrus, stone and kiwi fruit supply chains.

In many countries, Chingford's global supply chains are already delivering advanced



All estates in Komati Fruits are Globalgap accredited and have the ability to produce citrus varieties of high quality because of the specific climates and conditions in the regions in which they operate. The focus remains on ever increasing the quality standards of fruit and packing practices

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farming practices and showing a willingness to collaborate further to innovate and improve. From this platform the Chingford team is actively engaging its wider grower base to buy into the benefits of collaborative working and the implementation of industry best practice.

A fundamental feature of the strategy is appreciation for the critical role that the grower plays in determining sustainability performance, not only of the farm, but the entire supply chain.

“Primary agriculture sits at the base of the triangle upon which the entire supply chain stands,” explains Wood. “Primary fruit production is not



only the source of the physical flow of product that binds the CFL supply chain together, but the point with the greatest influence and impact, be it positive or negative, on the key subjects across the

sustainability spectrum, including soil health, biodiversity, ecosystem functioning, water, food security, socioeconomic development of communities, greenhouse gas emissions,



*Katco produces and packs some of the sweetest and juiciest citrus in the world!*

non-renewable energy use and ethical trade.”

CFL’s sustainable supply chain strategy is built on an understanding that CFL sits at the interface between a network of global fresh fruit supply chains and its customer. The role that CFL must play strategically within the total supply chain demands that Chingford’s strategy, development and implementation reflects two realities: one that is informed by the supply side factors and the other from the strategic needs and objectives of their customer. In other words, CFL has the responsibility



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“ Primary agriculture sits at the base of the triangle upon which the entire supply chain stands ”

to not only formulate strategy in response to the market needs, but also to be informed by, and in turn influence, consumer strategy based on its understanding of farm level and supplier realities.

CFL's sustainable supply chain strategy is a significant strategic undertaking, built on the understanding of the clear strategic intent of their

customer, its role and responsibility within the supply chain, the need to address the challenge of sustainability in a proactive way and the central role of the grower in achieving the desired outcomes.

CFL has already committed significant resources to the formulation of the strategy,



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Our strategy has been developed in a manner that reflects the business's desire to translate our customer's aspirations and needs into a robust strategy that the company can own

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putting in place the required internal structures and securing the initial buy-in not only from suppliers and growers around the globe but also from their customer.

CFL's contention is that, while sustainability is a complex and difficult subject, it is a subject that needs to be earnestly and urgently grappled with. By building a strategy on well considered, principles-based and a primary agriculture centric approach, CFL is confident that it is positioned to facilitate and catalyse a sincere and meaningful move towards the achievement of true sustainability for its farm base and supply chain. [www.chingfordfruit.co.uk/](http://www.chingfordfruit.co.uk/) ■

