



Press release

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## **Westfalia showcased its cutting-edge agricultural R&D at Fruit Logistica in Berlin**

Westfalia Fruit, a leading multinational supplier of avocados and a range of fresh vegetables and fruit, is a world leader in applied research, hosting the largest privately-funded subtropical fruit research organisation in the world.

Westfalia Fruit is the world's largest private investor in avocado research. The company's world renowned research programme, based in South Africa consists of a dedicated team of inhouse researchers, scientists and technicians who are aligned to several key academic research programmes globally. The team focus on three key areas to drive the industry forward: rootstocks, reducing inputs and continuous development and exploration. The team has recently welcomed Solomon Ntladi, a respected rootstock breeder based in South Africa.

For more than 40 years Westfalia has been researching disease-tolerant clonal rootstocks to develop superior avocado tree health and yields, in varying local conditions, that require minimal external inputs. The work demands significant investment as it can take 35 years to commercially develop new varieties. The process includes several years of planting trials in both nursery and orchard environments, with results continuously monitored throughout. With its diverse growing footprint, nursery and orchard trials are also duplicated across each growing area as the local natural environment is a key consideration.

"We've had ongoing success with existing avocado rootstocks such as Latas<sup>®</sup> and Dusa<sup>®</sup>, which offer high root-rot tolerance and higher yields. Dusa<sup>®</sup> also offers some salinity tolerance and it's been the top seller among clonally propagated rootstocks worldwide with more than 1.5 million Dusa<sup>®</sup> trees sold annually," said Johnathan Sutton, Group Safety and Environment Executive at Westfalia.

"Leola<sup>™</sup> and Zerala<sup>™</sup> are new rootstocks that were introduced to the market in 2020. With these, Westfalia can support growers with higher yielding rootstocks developed to suit a range of specific growing conditions around the world. Zerala<sup>™</sup> is the rootstock of choice for growing in areas facing salinity challenges. Ongoing trials in Peru are showing very positive outcomes and the first trees are scheduled to be planted in 2024," Johnathan continued.

Westfalia's work also includes research into reducing synthetic fungicides in the harvesting process, with a research focused on breeding plant genetics to be more tolerant to pests and diseases, as well as well as plant based treatments.

"These plant based treatments are natural fruit sterilants like mineral or plant based oils such as thyme or citrus oil. We currently have four or five different trials running using natural fungicides across Westfalia's global operations in Europe and beyond," explained Johnathan.

"These trials are a good demonstration of how we approach research at Westfalia, based on our founder, Hans Merensky's philosophy. In a three step process we carry out thorough research, take that into demonstration trials and then move to commercialization if the first two steps are successful. There is no place in our business for new technology or science without thorough and measured testing. This formula helps us to achieve success!"



Some of the work undertaken by the team can be less reliant on technology and laboratory work, for example plant spacing in orchards, which examines how different spaces between trees can affect yield and tree health.

Recent trials suggested that wider gaps of 4 metres may be beneficial for specific cultivars – whilst some cultivars preferred 2 metre gaps – highlighting that not all are the same and trials must be tailored and recorded for different cultivars, environments and other variables.

Irrigation, feeding, husbandry techniques are also continuously questioned and examined to determine best practice for tree health, yield, quality and the environment.



Westfalia's inhouse researchers at research programme in South Africa. (Photo: Westfalia Fruit, PR017)



Westfalia's nursery in Peru. (Photo: Westfalia Fruit, PR017)



Westfalia's Avocado rootstocks. (Photo: Westfalia Fruit, PR017)

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### **About Westfalia Fruit**

The multinational Westfalia Fruit Group is a leading supplier of fresh and processed produce to international markets, offering a diverse range of quality fruit and related products via its vertically integrated supply chain. Founded over 70 years ago on guiding environmental, social, governance & sustainability principles. These practices, premised on the legacy of Dr Hans Merensky are at the heart of all that is done by the Group – “To Do Good”, – of which continue to underpin our approach today.

Today, operating in 15 countries spread over 5 continents, the Westfalia Fruit Group prides itself on advancing sustainable agricultural practices and being a responsible corporate citizen within the communities in which it operates.

As a frontrunner in the avocado industry, Westfalia grows, sources, ripens, packs, processes, and markets accredited avocados across the globe throughout the year. Value-added products include avocado oil, low-preservative guacamole, frozen avocado, and dried fruit.



Westfalia grows fruit in all major origins in the Americas and Africa and sources from partner orchards, giving the Group the most diverse avocado-growing footprint in the world. Westfalia's dynamic and integrated supply chain from research to the consumer benefits all stakeholders. The Group's research division, Westfalia Technological Services, is the world's largest privately funded subtropical fruit research unit. Its dedicated team of scientists and technicians focus on varietal development, innovation, and environmental matters, and provides a pivotal role in defining the future of the global avocado industry.

A supplier of choice to retail, wholesale, and food-service customers, Westfalia operates sales offices in the UK, Europe, North America, Latin America, southern Africa, and Asia. Fruit is packed in diverse formats and expertly ripened to deliver optimal eating quality. For more information visit [www.westfaliafruit.com](http://www.westfaliafruit.com).

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