

Hortgro and Tru-Cape bring back good-looking first apple variety

Joseph Booysen

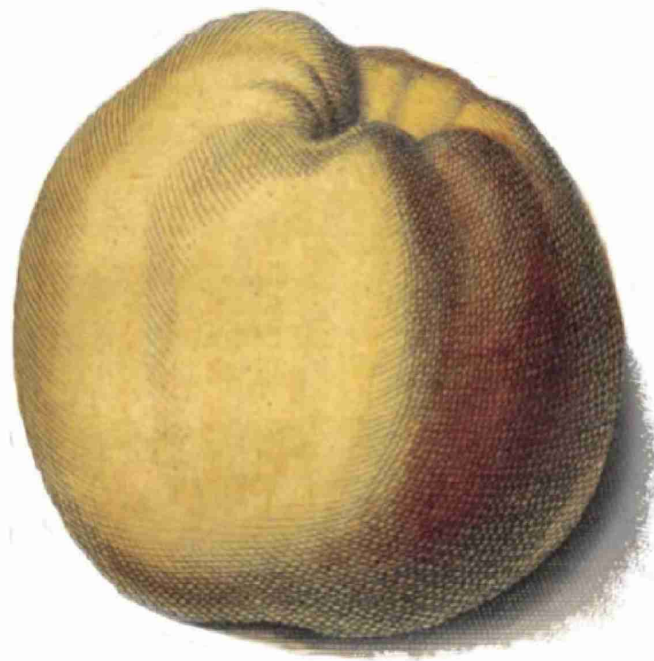
NEXT year Hortgro and Tru-Cape will begin planting South Africa's first apple variety after an absence of more than 350 years.

Although it is still in quarantine until next year, the Witte Wijn Appel, the first apple recorded in the diary of the Dutch governor at the Cape as picked in the Company's Garden on April 17, 1662, has been found in Holland and imported back into South Africa by Hortgro, the pome industry research support body and Tru-Cape Fruit Marketing, the largest exporter of South African apples and pears.

Tru-Cape, as a company responsible for selling more than half of all the apples and pears grown in the Western Cape, sees itself as the custodian of South African apple and pear genetics for future generations.

Anton Rabe, Hortgro's executive director, said the impact and contribution of the apple industry to the modern economy of the Western Cape was huge.

"This massive industry, which today contributes to more than 45 000 jobs, food security, rural stability, infrastructure and foreign earnings was, however, built on a small and nearly forgotten historical event of 356 years ago. We are really proud and privileged to participate in this initiative to bring the historical plant material back to South Africa, and will continue to honour the roots of our industry for many



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years to come," said Rabe.

Tru-Cape managing director Roelf Pienaar said that when he took over operations in 2013, the firm's new variety expert, Buks Nel, and the company's quality assurance manager, Henk Griessel, had already launched their book and planted the first heritage orchard.

"I knew then that the company was as serious about heirloom varieties as it is about developing new and improved apple and pear strains, and when the opportunity arose to import the budwood for the original South African apple,

the Witte Wijn Appel, it was an easy choice," said Pienaar.

Explaining how they first knew about the Witte Wijn, Griessel said: "Hermann Johann Knoop, in *Fructologia*, described the fruit in 1763 (freely translated from the Dutch) as a large, irregular shape and rough to look at, although he added the skin was smooth, coloured red, but sometimes green or yellowish on the one side. The flesh is soft, very juicy with a good taste. It is a good-looking apple and very tasty when stewed."

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