

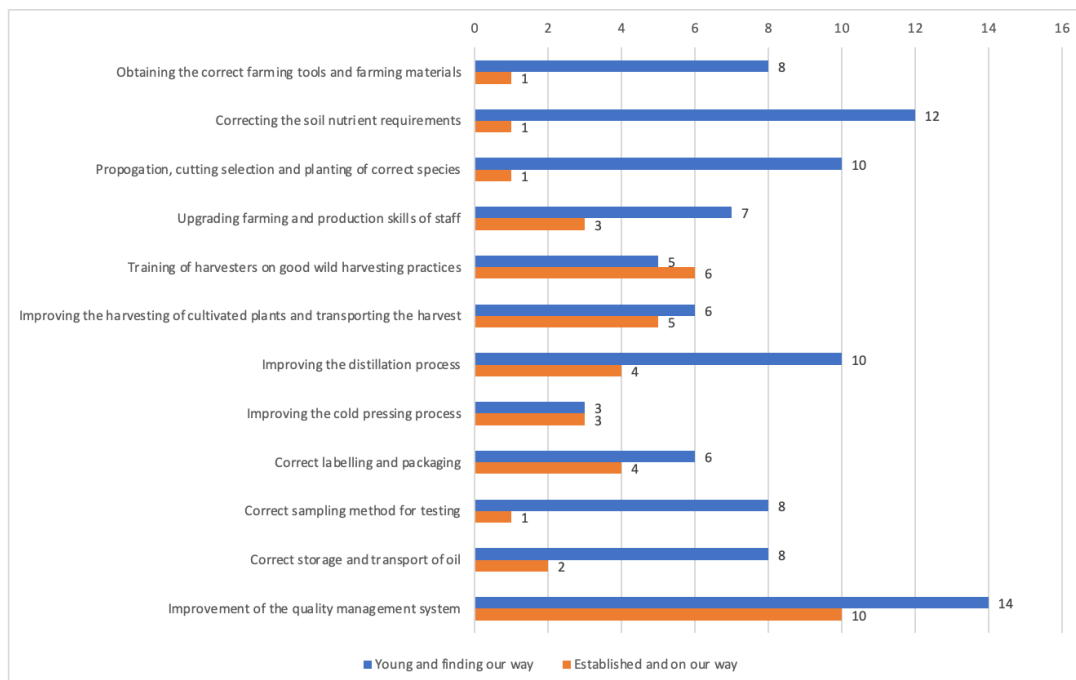
Capturing the narratives about the quality improvement of essential and vegetable oils production in Southern Africa

Briefing note to industry

In July 2022, the SECO-funded, UNIDO-implemented, Global Quality and Standards Programme-SA project, in collaboration with SAEOPA, launched a survey to gain insight into the efforts by producers of essential and vegetable oils to improve the quality of oils produced. The survey methodology allowed producers to share their stories of the quality improvements implemented and then allowed each producer to give meaning to their own stories using a self-signification process.

The survey results showed that producers were improving their quality systems over various quality control points, from soil nutrition improvements, and species selection, through different production processes to packaging, storage and transportation. Most producers were busy developing their in-house quality management systems, even if they identified as being young and still finding their way. The stories showed a shift from viewing quality as mainly being about the characteristics of the end product towards quality being about an organisation-wide attentiveness to quality. Notably, most producers assessed their efforts to improve the quality of the oil produced as being effective.

The graph below shows how producers prioritise improvements at different control points.



The results in the graph are split between producers who self-identified as “young and finding our way” and those who identified themselves as “established and on our way”.

Despite the production of essential and vegetable oils still being a relatively new industry, many producers were already striving to meet the requirements of international buyers. To this end, most producers described the assistance they have received to improve the oil quality as having made a big difference. The training courses, webinars and events organised to support the essential and vegetable oil producers were an important source of information on where to focus efforts to improve.

Most producers reported that they have shifted towards using independent testing laboratories for various tests, thus reducing their reliance on buyers testing the oils. At the same time, more producers reported that they were focused on matching their species selection to the buyer's physical and chemical profile specification or making sure they had the required quality support documentation available.

The survey approach provides insight into the challenges faced by producers as they rapidly improve quality management systems to meet the quality requirements of demanding international buyers. The results enable producers to calibrate their efforts with those of other producers facing similar challenges. The results show that once the basic quality management systems are in place, producers can shift their attention to increasing volumes and meeting the requirements of buyers.

Furthermore, the results could be helpful to the network of organisations in the public and private sectors that are providing quality-related services and advice to the producers of essential and vegetable oils. It would be important that the ongoing efforts to develop quality management systems by producers are further encouraged by innovations in the solutions provided by the supporting organisations in the quality landscape.

A detailed brochure is being prepared and will be made available to the industry.

The term "quality" has a relative meaning. This is expressed by the ISO definition: ***"The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs"***.

"Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort"

John Ruskin