UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA

Creating Opportunities

BID PROPOSAL: To Host the XI International Symposium on Temperate Fruits in the Tropics and Subtropics (2028),
Submitted to: The International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS)
Proposed Convener: Dr Mduduzi Ngcobo
Proposed Host Institution and Venue: University of Mpumalanga (UMP), Mbombela Campus, South Africa

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Executive Summary

Bid to Host the XI International Symposium on Temperate Fruits in the Tropics and Subtropics (2028): September 11-15, 2028

University of Mpumalanga (Mbombela Campus), South Africa

The University of Mpumalanga (UMP), under the convenorship of Dr Mduduzi Ngcobo, is honoured to submit this proposal to host the XI International Symposium on Temperate Fruits in the Tropics and Subtropics (2028) under the auspices of the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS).

Mbombela, in Mpumalanga Province, represents one of the most dynamic and strategically significant locations globally for this symposium. Together with neighbouring Limpopo Province, the region is experiencing a transformative shift in horticultural production, marked by the successful establishment of temperate fruit crops—such as apples, stone fruits, and table grapes—under subtropical conditions. These developments are being driven by climate variability, technological advancements, and innovative production systems.

Consequently, Mpumalanga has emerged as a "living laboratory" for climate adaptation in horticulture, where traditional production boundaries are being redefined in real time. Hosting the symposium in Mbombela will offer delegates a unique opportunity to engage directly with pioneering research, commercial innovations, and practical demonstrations of climate-resilient fruit production systems.

The proposed convener, Dr Mduduzi Ngcobo, is an active member of ISHS with recognized expertise in postharvest technology, fruit quality, and value chain optimization. His leadership, combined with the University of Mpumalanga's expanding research capacity, ensures strong scientific direction and alignment with the objectives of the ISHS Working Group.

This bid is further strengthened by robust institutional, industry, and government support, including partnerships with leading fruit producers and stakeholders actively advancing temperate fruit production in subtropical environments. These collaborations ensure that the symposium will deliver both scientific excellence and practical relevance (see attached letters of support).

Mbombela offers excellent accessibility for international delegates via Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport and O.R. Tambo International Airport, complemented by a wide range of high-quality accommodation and conference facilities. The region is internationally renowned for its natural beauty and proximity to the Kruger National Park, providing exceptional opportunities for networking, cultural experiences, and leisure activities.

A key feature of the symposium will be technical tours and scientific excursions, providing firsthand exposure to orchards, experimental trials, and commercial operations that

demonstrate the adaptation of temperate fruits in non-traditional environments. These immersive experiences will distinguish the symposium as both scientifically rigorous and practically engaging.
In conclusion, Mbombela offers a compelling combination of scientific relevance, real-world applicability, institutional readiness, and international appeal. Hosting the XI Symposium at the University of Mpumalanga will ensure a high-impact, forward-looking event that advances knowledge, fosters global collaboration, and contributes meaningfully to the evolving discourse on climate-resilient horticultural systems.

1. Introduction

This proposal seeks to host the XI International Symposium on Temperate Fruits in the Tropics and Subtropics in 2028 at the University of Mpumalanga (UMP), Mbombela Campus, South Africa, under the auspices of the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS).
Mbombela, the capital city of Mpumalanga Province, is strategically located within one of South Africa's most dynamic horticultural regions. The province, together with the neighbouring Limpopo Province, has seen the establishment of temperate fruit orchards under subtropical climatic conditions, including apples, stone fruits, and table grapes.
This transformation positions Mbombela and its surrounding region as a globally significant "living laboratory" for climate change adaptation in fruit production systems, making it an ideal and timely host location for this symposium.

2. Compliance with ISHS Selection Criteria

2.1 Membership of ISHS

The proposed convener, **Dr Mduduzi Ngcobo**, is a registered member of the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS) and meets the eligibility requirements.

2.2 Involvement in Previous Working Group Activities

The convener has an established record of active participation and leadership in ISHS-related scientific and organisational activities. Key contributions include:

- Serving as Chair of the Local Organising Committee and member of the Scientific Committee for the upcoming ISHS Model-IT 2027 Symposium, to be hosted at Stellenbosch University.
- Membership of the Local Organising Committee for the ISHS IV International Symposium on Beverage Crops (2026).
- Serving on both the Local Organising Committee and Scientific Committee for POSTHARVEST AFRICA 2012, held in Stellenbosch. This major event incorporated the 7th International CIGR Technical Symposium and the 2nd International Conference on Postharvest Technology and Quality Management, demonstrating experience in delivering large, multidisciplinary international conferences.

In addition, the convener, together with colleagues at the University of Mpumalanga (UMP), is actively engaged in research on tropical and subtropical horticultural systems, including emerging temperate fruit production in non-traditional environments. This work aligns closely with the objectives of the ISHS Working Group and reflects sustained engagement in global scientific discourse.

2.3 Scientific Standing of the Convener

Dr Mduduzi Ngcobo is an established and highly regarded academic in Postharvest Technology, with a strong and impactful research profile. He has authored over 25 peer-reviewed publications in reputable scientific journals, with his work receiving more than 700 citations and achieving an H-index of 12, reflecting both the quality and influence of his research within the international scientific community.

In addition to his academic credentials, Dr Ngcobo brings extensive industry leadership experience. He has held several senior positions within the fruit and horticultural sector, including:

- Institute Manager at the Agricultural Research Council – Tropical and Subtropical Crops Institute
- Head of Research and Innovation at the Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB)
- Various technical and leadership roles at Dole South Africa, including an international secondment to Dole Europe

His experience spans temperate, tropical, and subtropical fruit industries, providing a comprehensive understanding of diverse production systems. His key research focus areas—well aligned with the symposium theme—include:

- Postharvest physiology of fruit crops
- Fruit quality management and storage under variable climatic conditions
- Adaptation of fruit production systems to climate variability and change
- Value chain optimisation and efficiency in horticultural systems

Dr Ngcobo has actively participated in and presented at ISHS conferences, demonstrating strong engagement with the global horticultural science community. His combined academic excellence, industry expertise, and international exposure position him to lead the development of a scientifically rigorous and globally relevant symposium programme.

2.4 Organisational Capacity

The proposed symposium is supported by a strong and experienced organisational framework. The current ISHS Chair for Tropical and Subtropical Fruits, **Dr Karin Hannweg**, has kindly agreed to form part of the organising structure, subject to a successful bid, further strengthening scientific oversight and alignment with ISHS standards.

The organising team will collaborate with **Southern Cross Conferences**, a highly reputable Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) with extensive experience and a proven track record in delivering major fruit industry conferences. The company has successfully supported numerous ISHS events, ensuring adherence to international best practices in conference planning and execution.

The **University of Mpumalanga (Mbombela Campus)** offers excellent infrastructure and institutional support, including:

- Modern lecture theatres and state-of-the-art conference facilities
- Dedicated venues for both plenary and parallel sessions
- Established institutional systems for efficient event coordination
- Strategic location within Mbombela, a well-developed and accessible urban centre

Collectively, these resources, partnerships, and institutional support structures ensure the efficient, professional, and successful delivery of a high-quality international symposium that meets ISHS standards and expectations.

2.5 Institutional and Industry Support

The proposed symposium benefits from strong support:

- Institutional endorsement from the University of Mpumalanga
- Active engagement with fruit industries in Mpumalanga and Limpopo
- Linkages with commercial producers of **temperate fruits in subtropical environments**
- Potential partnerships with government and agricultural agencies

This integrated support base enhances both the scientific and practical relevance of the symposium.

2.6 Suitability for International Participation

Mbombela is well-positioned to host international delegates:

- Accessible via **Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (KMIA)** and OR Tambo International Airport
- Good road connectivity and transport infrastructure
- Availability of quality hotels and conference accommodation
- Safe, welcoming, and cost-effective destination

These factors support strong international attendance.

2.7 Scientific Excursions and Technical Visits

Mbombela's location offers exceptional opportunities for scientific tours, a key strength of this bid:

- Temperate fruit orchards (apples, stone fruits, table grapes) established in subtropical climates
- Research trials focusing on **low chill cultivars and climate adaptation strategies**
- Commercial farms demonstrating innovative production systems
- Packhouses and export facilities

These experiences will allow delegates to directly observe how **global warming and climatic shifts are redefining fruit production boundaries**.

2.8 Attractiveness of Venue and Location

Mbombela and its surroundings provide a highly attractive destination:

- Gateway to the **Kruger National Park**
- Rich biodiversity and scenic landscapes
- Cultural attractions and eco-tourism opportunities
- High-quality hospitality infrastructure

This ensures a memorable experience for both delegates and accompanying persons.

3. Proposed Theme

"Temperate Fruit Production in a Changing Climate: Innovation, Adaptation, and Sustainability in Tropical and Subtropical Regions"

4. Strategic Significance of Mbombela as Host Location

Mbombela and the greater Mpumalanga region represent a frontline zone of agricultural transition, where:

- Temperate fruits are increasingly grown outside traditional cold-climate zones

- Climate change is actively shaping production systems
- New cultivars, technologies, and management practices are being tested

The region therefore provides a real-world case study of global importance, enabling the symposium to move beyond theory into applied, field-based learning and discussion.

5. Expected Outcomes

- Advancement of global knowledge on **temperature adaptation and fruit physiology**
- Strengthened international collaborations in horticultural science
- Increased visibility of African contributions to climate resilience in agriculture
- Capacity building for emerging researchers and postgraduate students

6. Conclusion

The University of Mpumalanga in Mbombela provides a compelling and strategic venue to host the XI International Symposium on Temperate Fruits in the Tropics and Subtropics (2028).
With its unique positioning as a living laboratory for climate-adaptive fruit production, strong institutional support, excellent facilities, and global accessibility, Mbombela offers an outstanding opportunity to host a symposium that is both scientifically impactful and globally relevant.