



Increase of lemon exports to Middle East

Loss of Russian market keeps more lemons at home

The Middle East, which takes approximately a third of South Africa's lemons, is a site of "struggle" at the moment, says an exporter who specialises in the market.

By the end of last week, 2.6 million 15kg cartons of lemons had already been packed in South Africa and over a million have been exported, mostly to the Middle East, as is usual for this time of year.

As had been expected since the start of the Russian war, lemons that would have gone to Russia (larger lemons and also class 2 fruit), are placing pressure on lemon prices on the Middle Eastern market.

"The Middle East is predominantly a smaller lemon market, so if the Russian fruit is heading there, it is not what the traditional Middle East market wants. This will send the market into a downward spiral," is the opinion of a Limpopo citrus exporter. "The Middle East is also no longer a market that accepts a mediocre class fruit, the consumer wants a good quality fruit."

Exports to Russia are 129,000 cartons this season until end week 11, versus 188,000 cartons 2021 YTD.

In the Far East and Malaysia, though, prices for South African lemons are fair, FreshPlaza is told.

Local market: lemon oversupply, "but not terrible"



"We are seeing the effect of exporters not able to be sending lemons to Russia," remarks a citrus trader at the Johannesburg fresh produce market where they have received consignments destined for Russia, but instead diverted to the domestic market.

"We have an oversupply, but not a terrible oversupply."

The lemons grown for Russia, so to speak, are of similar counts that they would normally receive, the trader continues, though generally better quality.

He further notes that the lemon market has been unpredictable over the past few seasons.

"We're expecting a big oversupply [on the domestic market] because of Russia but other markets might open up. We're taking it week by week."

Lemon prices are a bit lower for early season, R80 (4.9 euros) to R120 (7.4 euros) per 15kg carton at the moment. The average class 1 lemon price is R5,18 (0.3 euro) per kilogram; fairly weak prices for lemon growers, says another market agent at the Johannesburg market.

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