

Citrus exports set for modest growth in 2026 season

South Africa's citrus exports are expected to grow by between 3% and 5% in the 2026 season, reaching an estimated 210 to 215 million 15kg cartons, according to the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA).



Source: [Unsplash](#)

The estimates exclude late mandarins, which will be released in the coming weeks, but historical trends suggest overall export volumes will continue on a steady upward trajectory.

CGA CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele said the outlook remains positive despite global uncertainty. "We are acutely aware of the uncertainties the industry faces, including geopolitical risks and their potential impact on demand, shipping and input costs. However, steady growth towards another strong export season is within reach," he said.

Mixed performance across varieties

Lemon exports are expected to increase 10% year on year to 45.9 million cartons, supported by new orchards coming into production and recovery in key growing regions.

Navel orange exports are projected to decline 5% from last year's record levels to 30 million cartons, although still above 2024 volumes.

Valencia oranges, the largest category, are expected to rise slightly by 1.6% to 63 million cartons with regional variations driven by weather conditions. Northern regions are forecast to record higher yields, while production in parts of the Eastern and Western Cape is expected to decline due to drier conditions.

Grapefruit exports are set for the strongest growth, increasing 16% to 15.7 million cartons, largely due to favourable growing conditions.

Early mandarin varieties show mixed results, with Satsuma volumes expected to remain stable around 1.5 million cartons, while Nova and Clementine exports are projected to decline slightly.

Industry challenges remain

Ntshabele said global instability could affect the season, particularly through its impact on logistics, fuel availability and export demand.

He added that structural constraints continue to limit growth, including access to key export markets such as China, India and the United States, as well as ongoing trade barriers in the European Union.

Logistics inefficiencies, particularly in rail, also remain a concern for the industry.

Key export sector

South Africa's citrus industry employs around 140,000 people at the farm level and remains the country's largest agricultural export sector.

The CGA said long-term growth in exports could support further job creation and rural development, provided key constraints are addressed.

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