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Growers warn fuel disruptions could hit citrus export volumes

'One of the reasons we are sounding alarm bells is that we are trying to look forward and say that this is one of the key issues that might have an impact on our season,' says Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association.



Duduzile Ramela · 1 Apr 2026 ⌚ 15:15



[TOP STORY] Growers warn fuel disruptions could hit citrus expc **iono.fm**

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DUDUZILE RAMELA: As South Africa's citrus export season begins, growers are sounding the alarm about isolated cases of diesel shortages, seemingly caused by unusual buying patterns and controlled allocation by industry players.

This, in spite of the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources (DMPR) saying the country's fuel supply remains stable for the near term, 95% of citrus exports are moved by road to ports, exposing the industry to fuel supply and price shocks.

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Dr. BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE is CEO of the Citrus Growers Association. He joins us now to explore available options to cushion the potential blow caused by hoarding. Thank you very much, Doc, for your time. What is the situation as we speak today?

BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE: We still are concerned in terms of the reports that we are receiving, that there are isolated incidences of diesel shortages in several areas, but we haven't had the updated information as of today. But as of yesterday, that was still the information that we had at hand.

DUDUZILE RAMELA: We also know that the petrol price from today has gone up R3, and (the) fuel levy (was) cut. Does that make a difference at all? As you mentioned, you move your goods by road to ports, so that consumes a lot of fuel.

BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE: We are concerned.

Although we welcome the R3 reprieve, we believe that more can still be done.

I think one of the challenges, and this is what we supported, raised by AgriSA (Agriculture South Africa) and Agbiz (Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa), what can ultimately impact the hoarding and so forth, would be improved transparency in terms of fuel pricing.

That can also be driven through, a call it weekly adjustments in terms of the regulated prices of fuel.

You know that currently we all had to wait for today, and because of that, that could have influenced all the behavioural issues that have been mentioned, rationing and controlling fuel, because ultimately, with the expected increase, there is a likelihood for some profit to be made simply selling at a higher price next week.

So if the price is adjusted continuously, that information flows to everyone, that improves transparency.

DUDUZILE RAMELA: South Africa exported a record of 3.5 million metric tonnes of citrus in 2025, and we are the world's second largest citrus exporter after Spain. As we speak about energy prices, this is as a result of what is happening in the Middle East.

I do wonder how this has impacted, or if it has an impact at all, on your supply chains. If so, how?

BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE: Our season hasn't started as yet, and one of the reasons we are sounding alarm bells is that we are trying to look forward and say, as we look at the horizon, this is one of the key issues that might have an impact on our season.

This is because, as we say, 95% of our shipments are on road, and we support the initiatives that have come out of the Department of Transport, trying to move a lot of consignments that are on the road to rail.

the road to rail.

We know that will take some time, but that would give us some sort of breathing space, because rail is cheaper and it's much more dependable. Ultimately, it will help us to get to market much quicker than we currently are experiencing with road.

But with all these price increases, we run the risk of growers making losses, as they would be impacted by high fuel prices.

Fuel is also used on farms to do many other things, to water orchards, it's used to move tractors and so forth, as fruit is collected from the orchards to pack houses. So it's quite a significant cost for citrus growers.

DUDUZILE RAMELA: In spite of the DMPR warning stating that fuel supply remains stable for the near term, there's been hoarding that has been experienced, which is something that is of concern to you as an organisation, and to the sector at large.

What are the contingency plans that you have in place? If you do not have contingency plans, what then is your call more so to South Africans?

BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE: I think we all, as South Africans, become more responsible and there is better coordination between government and all other players, that would help us and assist the situation to reduce all the other behaviours that we've spoken about.

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Ultimately, all of us will benefit, and there's a greater public good that can be achieved for all citizens, as well as our growers.

DUDUZILE RAMELA: On a lighter note, we've been having amazing rain. What has this done for the crop?

BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE: In many areas of the country, we've had very good growing conditions, and we're looking forward with huge expectations that we might have a good crop.

Sometime in the week we will release our own estimates as to what that looks like, but on the whole, in a rounded way, we potentially have a good crop coming out.

DUDUZILE RAMELA: Might it exceed last year's record of 3.5 million metric tons of citrus?

BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE: That remains to be seen, because ultimately, the estimate that we normally offer is not a production estimate per se. It is what is possible to be exported, and so

we call it an export estimate.

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To give you a sense, with the current impact in the Middle East, where we send 20% to 25% of our crop, you start having to look at that crop and say, how are we to adjust estimates differently in view of the unlikely event that we can't send the crop to some parts of the world.

So those are the likely other impacts at play that would impact our ability to give a higher or a lower estimate.

DUDUZILE RAMELA: You mentioned a very good point, because the Middle East is the second biggest export market for South African citrus after Europe, and last year it accounted for 19% of total shipments. Are you able to give us more detail in terms of the outlook?

Because in the short term, we're hearing that this will be wrapped up in about two to three weeks' time.

We're also expecting another address tonight from President Donald Trump. We're not clear what's going to come out of that. Even though the markets are rallying, there's still some cautious optimism. On your side, what does it look like?

BOITSHOKO NTSHABELE: Look, we're keenly watching the situation as it evolves, and we are cautiously optimistic that some sort of opportunity is available and on the table for the parties to resolve the dispute.

That would give us opportunities to be able to ship the usual shipments that go to that part of the world.

Our season starts in a few weeks, and we are hopeful that some sort of leeway is on the table to make that a reality.

DUDUZILE RAMELA: Thank you so much for your contribution, Doc. Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele is CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association.

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