

South African citrus exports projected to grow up to 5 percent in 2026

In its first season projection, the South African citrus industry is forecasting a **2026 season with moderate growth**, totaling exports of between 210 and 215 million 33-pound cartons. This new estimate accounts for an increase of up to five percent compared to the previous year.



The report, published by the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa ([CGA](#)), excluded the country's late mandarin production and the group's main category, as the volumes will be available in the coming weeks.

The CGA emphasized that, despite a complex international landscape, **the South African citrus industry is in a continuous expansive trajectory**.



"If we manage to mitigate factors such as the impact of the Middle East conflict on demand, logistics, and costs, it is possible to move toward another record season," stated CGA CEO, Boitshoko Ntshabele.

A balanced South African citrus campaign

The varietal breakdown shows a balanced season, with high fruit quality and varied performance across species and regions.

For **lemons**, exports are projected at **45.9 million 33-pound cartons**, up 10 percent from 2025. This increase is the result of new orchards in the Sundays River Valley beginning production and the recovery of areas affected by hail in previous seasons.

Meanwhile, **Navel oranges are expected to reach 30 million cartons**, five percent below last year's record production, but still above 2024 levels. Within this category, the CGA estimates 13.4 million cartons of early and mid-season varieties and 16.6 million of late varieties.



Valencia orange production should increase slightly by 1.6 percent, reaching 63 million cartons. Following an exceptional season, yields should normalize this year, although unevenly. While northern areas should experience increases, the south anticipates productive drops due to drier conditions and alternation.

Increase in grapefruit and adjustments in early mandarins

Grapefruit exports are projected at 15.7 million 37.5-pound cartons, a 16 percent year-on-year increase driven by favorable weather. However, the CGA reports slightly smaller calibers and delays in the initial harvest due to rains in the north.

The early Satsuma mandarin should **remain around 1.5 million cartons**, while Nova will drop three percent to 5.6 million cartons, and clementines will decrease four percent, totaling 6.2 million cartons.

The South African citrus organization will release figures for late mandarins later in the month, although they historically represent the majority of the South African exported volume in this category.

Global challenges and focus on competitiveness

The CGA warned that the **citrus season will be marked by external factors**, such as geopolitical uncertainty, higher logistical costs, and the uncertain availability of inputs, which will demand

greater flexibility from the sector.



The organization also stressed the need to improve South African citrus access to key markets such as China, India, and the United States, as well as advancing in logistical efficiency, especially in the railway network.

Furthermore, they questioned the phytosanitary requirements of the European Union, describing them as a significant restriction on the sector's growth.

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