

New protocol updates plant health rules, boosting South African citrus exports to China

[South African Citrus Growers' Association](#) (CGA) and the local Department of Agriculture are celebrating the **successful amendment of the plant health protocol** governing the export of the country's citrus to China.



The amended protocol introduces additional pest risk mitigation options, **reflecting a science-based approach** to plant health compliance grounded in data from [Citrus Research International](#) (CRI). This update marks a crucial step forward for the local industry and is expected to significantly boost South Africa's citrus presence in the Chinese market.

"South Africa places a high value on its relationship with China, which continues to create meaningful opportunities across our agricultural sector," said Minister of Agriculture in South Africa, John Steenhuisen. "These agreements are **the result of trust, respect, and sustained cooperation**, and they are helping open doors for our producers at a time when diversification has never been more important."



In a joint press release, the South African entities say that enhanced treatment options will increase the quality of fruit reaching Chinese consumers, while also reducing costs and improving export

efficiencies for local producers and exporters.

Further opening the Chinese market to South African citrus

China's 1.4 billion people market is a prime destination for South African citrus, and products such as navel oranges, lemons, and grapefruits are highly valued by local consumers.

"This agreement cannot be more timely, because South Africa's citrus season this year is just beginning and going very strong. It reflects the high level of China-South Africa bilateral relations and the deep friendship between our peoples," said the Chinese Ambassador in South Africa, Wu Peng, at the signing ceremony in Pretoria.

While exports to China and Hong Kong accounted for approximately six percent of total South African citrus exports in 2025 (11.5 million cartons), **there is a significant opportunity to expand this share**, supported by strong consumer demand and complementary seasonal supply.

"The CGA remains committed to working closely with government and international partners to strengthen market access, uphold high phytosanitary standards, and support the sustainable growth of the citrus industry," said CGA CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele.



Photo: Archive.

A closer relationship

Expanded access for South African citrus into the Chinese market is **only one of the ways the countries are getting closer**.

The CGA has also celebrated recent progress in broader economic cooperation between South Africa and China through the Economic Partnership Agreement Framework, signed in February

2026. The organization also emphasized the importance of various negotiations aimed at establishing planned unilateral tariff reductions.

Once finalized, these developments are expected to **enhance the competitiveness of South African citrus in the Chinese market**. The CGA continues to advocate for citrus to be included in the so-called "Early Harvest agreement," which would allow the industry to benefit from these tariff improvements as early as the 2026 season.

**All images courtesy of South African Citrus Growers' Association, unless stated otherwise.*

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