

More SA citrus to reach world markets in 2026

By Clayton Swart

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South Africa's citrus industry is set for another strong season this year, with higher export volumes expected. According to Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa, harvesting and exports are set to ramp up in the coming weeks.



The early-season satsumas are nearly ready for harvesting on the farm, Derde Heuwel, just outside Montagu in the Western Cape. Image: Clayton Swart



"The production growth trajectory is still the same. More fruit will be coming off the trees over the next few years. This creates the opportunity, if it is matched with improved market access, to create tens of thousands of new jobs," Ntshabele told *Farmer's Weekly*.

In the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) [first crop estimate for the 2026 season](#), released on 1 April, the variety breakdown indicates a balanced crop. Total citrus exports across all varieties are expected to increase by 3% to 5%, reaching between 210 million and 215 million 15kg cartons. In 2025, CGA growers packed 203,4 million 15kg cartons.

According to the estimate, about 45,9 million 15kg cartons of lemons are expected to be exported to key markets, up 10% from the 41,6 million exported in 2025. The increase is due to a significant number of young trees coming into production in the Sundays River Valley, as well as recovery in the Senwes region (Marble Hall and Groblersdal) from hail damage in past seasons.



The estimate shows 30 million 15kg cartons for navel oranges, down 5% from 2025's record exports but still in line with the long-term growth trajectory.

The navel category is split into early- and mid-season navels (13,4 million cartons) and late navels (16,6 million). The Valencia estimate is 63 million 15kg cartons for 2026, up 1,6%.

Favourable weather in the northern regions underpins increased estimates of between 4% and 17% above 2025 volumes. Meanwhile, the southern growing regions in the Eastern and Western Cape expect to have between 7% and 20% lower Valencia production this year.

An increase in Valencia production in Zimbabwe, as well as the entry of Botswana and Mozambique into this market, is also notable. Grapefruit exports are estimated to have a significant increase of 16% at 15,7 million 17kg cartons compared with last year.

Estimates cover three early mandarin varieties. The satsuma season is likely to close at around 1,5 million 15kg cartons, as in 2024. The Nova season shows a 3% decrease to 5,6 million 15kg cartons, while the projection for clementines is a decline of 4% to 6,2 million 15kg cartons.

Overcoming global challenges

Every season brings new global challenges for the citrus industry. Last year it was US tariffs, and this year, the war in the Middle East. Ntshabele said the industry has weathered difficult seasons before.

"The CGA remains focused on aspects within its control. The citrus season has not yet ramped up and will only do so in the coming weeks. Because it is still early in the season, only a small number of consignments have been affected, with delays rather than direct disruption to shipments," he said.

Citrus doing well in Montagu

Farmer Jim Kriel, whose father started citrus plantings in the Montagu area in the Western Cape in the 1970s, has handed over the 50ha farm, Derde Heuwel, to his son, Nico, who continues the family farming tradition in the Kingna River valley just outside the town.

"The early satsumas do well, but the later ones don't perform as well in the market. The lemons are coming later this season. We have Nova [mandarins] and navel [oranges], as well as late Valencia [oranges] called Midnights, which are harvested last. This gives us a nice, extended season," Jim explained.

He added that it is too early to predict the impact of the war in the Middle East on citrus exports. "We will have to wait and see how the situation unfolds."



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