

South African fruit exports adapt to Middle East conflict

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War in the Middle East has disrupted exports, but South African suppliers are finding ways to send citrus and apples to the region



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While war in the Middle East has created great obstacles for South African growers and exporters to the region, they have said that the fruit will always find its way to the market if there is demand.

Initially, the conflict seriously disrupted supply lines for stonefruit and grape exporters, and it is true to say that they probably suffered the most.

However, now that supply has moved to products with a longer shelf-life, it seems the fruit is making its way to customers.

South Africa's citrus season is rapidly gaining momentum, with fruit now beginning to flow steadily to markets in the Middle East.

Apple exporters, meanwhile, have said that after initial challenges, things are going much better.

"Price levels have risen since the war started," said Calla du Toit, procurement manager at Tru-Cape. "This helps us to cover higher cost in maintaining supply lines."

It is also clear that despite the disruptions, South African apples remain popular among Middle East consumers.

Of South Africa's two new full red Gala types, Bingo is specifically earmarked for the Middle East and does extremely well there, according to Hein Keulder, chief executive of Fruitways.

The other full red Gala-type, Flash Gala, has so far been focused on India and China and this indicates that within the South African industry there is great desire to serve markets in specific ways.



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"They are both excellent apples and presents new excitement about the apple category," Keulder noted.

The Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) said the current pressures on exporters of citrus are confined to marginally longer transit times and higher shipping costs, but there is no material diversion of South African citrus volumes to alternative markets away from the Middle East.

"Early consignments have already arrived in Middle Eastern markets, taking somewhat longer to reach destination due to adjusted shipping routes, but all feedback indicates that quality is holding up well," said Boitshoko Ntshabele, chief executive of the CGA.

The Association pointed out that demand in Middle Eastern markets remains in line with expectations.

South African suppliers remain committed to servicing their Middle Eastern customers.

"All shipping lines are accepting container bookings and are moving cargo via alternative routes that have been put in place following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz," Ntshabele continued.

"These rerouted services do involve longer shipment times and higher costs, however, but they continue to provide access to Middle Eastern ports."

Based on current information, role-players are aiming to supply the Middle East and other destination markets largely in line with their original goals set at the beginning of the year.

"The CGA notes, however, that the situation remains fluid and could change as the season progresses," he outlined.

"Logistics, transit times, costs and market dynamics are all being closely monitored, alongside developments in global supply to the Middle East from other regions.

"The CGA has invested significantly in its data and market intelligence capacity, as well as in specialist monitoring and review forums to support key stakeholders with capacity planning in the logistics chain," Ntshabele added.

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