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Citrus growers call for trade deal with US

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The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has welcomed the US Senate's extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa) until the end of 2026.

However, the CGA said the extension of Agoa did not materially impact the tariff regime for South African citrus exports to the US and has called for a dedicated trade deal for the fruits between the two countries.

"Based on the prevailing legal interpretation, the tariffs imposed by the White House take precedence over Agoa benefits. As a result, Agoa's renewal does not, at present, alter market access conditions for local citrus exporters," the GGA said in a statement.

"It should be noted that in November last year, in a positive development, oranges were granted an exemption from the 30% US tariffs, allowing them to enter the market duty-free. This development provided welcome relief to South African orange growers, particularly in the regions that are

heavily reliant on the American market, such as the Western and Northern Cape," the association said.

However, it said mandarins were not included in this exemption.

"South African mandarins have proved to be popular in the US. Thus, a 30% tariff on mandarins is expected to negatively affect mandarin growers in the Western Cape and Northern Cape during the 2026 season, which is approximately set to start in April," the CGA said.

CGA chief executive Boitshoko Ntshabele said applying tariffs to mandarins risked creating price spikes, supply shortages, and inflationary pressure in the US.

"SA supplies mandarins counter-seasonally to America, so we do not threaten US production or jobs. In fact, we help keep consumers in the category year-round with our high-quality and healthy citrus, handing the consumers over to fellow growers in states like California and Florida at the end of our season," Ntshabele said.

Entire communities depend on SA-US trade, with Citrusdal standing as a clear example of how significantly local livelihoods are tied to continued access to the US market.

CGA chairperson Gerrit van der Merwe said that, given all the complexities, the Agoa extension currently had no meaningful effect on growers' planning for the coming season.

"The situation remains somewhat uncertain. This underscores the need for a stable and mutually beneficial trade agreement between SA and the US," he said.

He noted that, unlike Agoa, whose future is periodically uncertain, a dedicated trade agreement could provide both SA and the US with the predictability they urgently require.

The CGA said unimpeded access to the US citrus market remained a priority for the local citrus sector.