

South African fruit exports reach record despite tariffs and port delays

South African fruit growers recorded higher export volumes in 2025 despite elevated input costs, market uncertainty, and pesticide withdrawals.

The citrus industry reported a new export high in the 2025 season, packing 203,4 million 15kg-equivalent cartons for export. This was 19% above the April estimate and 22% higher than in 2024. According to the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), exports were supported by strong overseas demand for processing-grade juicing oranges and lemons, an earlier end to Northern Hemisphere supply, and improved logistics performance at Transnet.

Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the CGA, noted that "Volume is just one single measure with which to assess an industry". He added: "Our growers continue to face challenges, including unpredictable price and market dynamics, rising input costs, as well as market access issues such as high tariffs and unscientific plant health measures."

Ntshabele said that after the Trump administration imposed 30% import tariffs on South Africa, "growers in the Western and Northern Cape, the only two provinces that export to the U.S., were able to increase and fast-track shipments to the U.S. before the tariff deadline". Later, oranges were exempted from the tariffs, while mandarins were not.

Mandarin exports increased 28% year on year to 53,5 million cartons, 19% above the April estimate. Lemon exports reached 41,3 million cartons, exceeding the April estimate by 26% and rising 19% from 2024. Navel orange exports totalled 31,5 million cartons, while Valencia oranges reached 61,8 million cartons. Grapefruit exports amounted to 15,3 million cartons.

In deciduous fruit, South Africa expanded its export footprint, becoming the largest apple exporter in the Southern Hemisphere, increasing pear exports to India, and obtaining access to China for several stone fruit categories. Hortgro told Farmer's

Weekly that producers faced ongoing port inefficiencies, stricter phytosanitary requirements, and climate-related disruptions that affected planning and export flow.

By early December, the table grape industry expected exports of 79,4 million 4.5 kg-equivalent cartons, 0,6% above the previous season. However, wind disruptions at the Port of Cape Town resulted in 414 hours of weather-related delays. In week 48 alone, the port was windbound for 66 hours. A system outage further constrained shipping, offsetting earlier productivity gains. Table grapes were not included in the U.S. tariff exemptions announced in November.

Throughout the year, industry and government pursued alternative export markets in Asia and tariff reductions in existing destinations, alongside discussions on expanding reefer plug capacity at Cape Town harbour.

Source: Farmer's Weekly (<https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/fruit-growers-deliver-in-2025-but-logistics-limit-exports/>)

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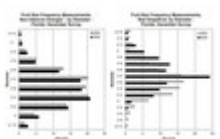
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