

Importers warn that bunched arrivals and monsoon disruption can turn a promising SA citrus season into distress selling

South African citrus steps in as Egypt and China wind down in India

India's imported citrus market is entering its annual transition period, with South African oranges and mandarins gradually replacing Egyptian oranges and Chinese easy peelers on the market. According to A.R. Chiranjeevi of Scion Agricos, the changeover comes at a time when quality, arrival timing and logistics are becoming just as important as price."

"The first half of the year told two different stories," Chiranjeevi explains. "Egypt dominated the orange market through April, although volumes fluctuated because of longer transit times and quality concerns. At the same time, Chinese Wogan mandarins maintained a steady presence at workable prices. Over the past two to three weeks, however, we've seen the market shift towards South African citrus."



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South Africa's soft citrus programme has started strongly, led by Nova mandarins. Chiranjeevi estimates that more than 760,000 cartons of South African mandarins have already entered the Indian market this season, with larger volumes continuing to arrive.

"Nhava Sheva remains the preferred entry point for most South African mandarins, while Chennai, Cochin and Mundra are handling smaller single-container volumes as importers continue to rely on the ports where they have confidence in the cold-chain."

The current market is characterised by a gradual handover between origins. Chinese easy peelers are winding down while South African mandarins, oranges, lemons and grapefruit steadily build volume.



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"Mandarins are clearly leading the programme. Indian consumers have become familiar with their eating quality over the years, and the trade knows they travel well over long distances. Lemons have also been a quiet but consistent performer, with steady demand and far less price volatility."

Orange volumes, meanwhile, are only beginning to build. "We're still at the very start of the South African orange season. Turkey Valencia arrivals will become meaningful from late July onwards, while Midnight Valencia shipments will begin arriving around the middle of August. If arrivals remain orderly, quality will remain the main selling point."



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While price continues to drive the bulk of India's imported citrus market, Chiranjeevi says branding is becoming important in premium retail channels. "For most buyers, landed price and fruit condition still determine purchasing decisions. But the premium segment has also been steadily growing because consistent brands remove uncertainty for wholesalers and modern retailers. When both the grower's and importer's names appear on the carton, buyers know who is accountable for the quality."

He estimates that the premium segment remains relatively small compared with the price-driven wholesale market, but continues to expand as modern retail and quick-commerce platforms place greater emphasis on consistency and presentation.



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Looking ahead, Chiranjeevi expects South Africa to dominate India's imported citrus category over the coming months, although weather could significantly influence market conditions. "The next two to three months belong to South Africa, but the monsoon is the variable everyone tends to underestimate. Bunched arrivals into Nhava Sheva combined with a wet fortnight are exactly what can turn a promising season into distress selling."

He believes the strongest performers this season will be suppliers who focus on disciplined shipping schedules rather than simply maximising volumes.

"The market increasingly rewards consistency over opportunism. Importers who invest in reliable supply chains, close grower relationships, quality control and recognised brands will always be in a stronger position when volumes peak and heavy rains test the supply chain," Chiranjeevi concludes.

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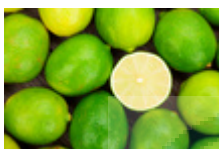
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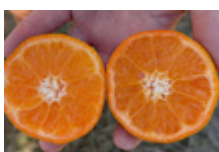
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