



South Africa holds its own in the race for global fruit markets

More than 130 years after South Africa exported its first shipment of peaches to the United Kingdom, the country's fresh fruit industry now exports millions of tonnes of produce to more than 100 destinations worldwide. As international demand for South Africa's premium-quality fruit continues to grow, so too does the competition to secure and retain export markets.



By [Fhumulani Ratshitanga](#)

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Source: Supplied | Fhumulani Ratshitanga , CEO, Fruit South Africa

In the 2024/5 season, the South African fresh fruit industry collectively produced 6 736 803 tonnes of fruit and exported 4 408 797 – the latter excludes mangoes and litchis.

But with all southern hemisphere fruit-producing countries jostling for a spot on international buyers' lists, the competition is fierce and nothing is ever guaranteed.

Gaining and maintaining markets (pillars of the industry's market access strategy) require top-of-the-class market intelligence, agility, and collaboration between all players in the value chain, as well as key stakeholders like the government.

The high stakes of South African fruit exports

Every visionary fruit producer aims to reach commercial status, where they stand to secure substantive returns.

However, efficient export of fresh fruit is a high-stakes and costly technical operation with many variables and unpredictable risks.

That which the producer cannot control

Occurrences that are completely out of producers' control, like weather-related delays and other port setbacks, or currency or price fluctuations can result in fruit spoilage and untold financial losses.

The industry has been working closely with decision-makers at the Port of Cape Town to secure long-term solutions for the ongoing challenges.

Capital, compliance and cultivars

Apart from extensive capital and infrastructural investment, among the requirements for commercial fruit producers are stringent market requirements, phytosanitary and sanitary compliance, meticulous cold chain management, quality assurance, and the presentation of competitive cultivars.

Producers who may have more substantial generational wealth – or other steady sources of finance – are more likely to absorb related shocks, compared to their first-generation counterparts.

Exporter dynamics

To export fruit sustainably and profitably, exporters require extensive expertise, financial capital and specialised logistics support skills.

Competitive global market conditions, non-payment risk, complex compliance requirements, currency fluctuations, and shipping disruptions are among the impediments that characterise the fruit export ecosystem.

Exporters are the critical bridge between the producer's harvested fruit and the international supermarket shelf. They help producers navigate compliance protocols – among other matters – apply their market intelligence for strategic market placement of the fruit, and help drive vital cold chain management.

The support structure

Fruit South Africa has six members: Berries ZA, the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) of Southern Africa, the Fresh Produce Exporters' Forum (FPEF), Hortgro (representing pome- and stone-fruit producers), the South African Table Grape Industry (SATI), and the Subtropical Growers' Association (Subtrop), which represents avocado, mango and litchi producers.

In exchange for paid producer levies, these organisations provide vital representation and support – from world-class research and development to finance, market intelligence, compliance support, and timely communication, among other services.

Constituents of these organisations lean heavily on this support, which also includes related advocacy by Fruit SA at national government level.

The South African fruit industry is certainly holding its own in the fast-evolving global fruit-trade landscape. But retaining its position demands sharpened agility and strengthened public-private cooperation – especially with the government.

ABOUT FHUMULANI RATSHITANGA

Fhumulani Ratshitanga is CEO of Fruit South Africa, the umbrella body representing the country's organised fruit industries
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