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Unusual lemon season with larger crop sizes, earlier timing coming to a close – CGA

13TH JULY 2026 BY: SCHALK BURGER - CREAMER MEDIA SENIOR DEPUTY EDITOR



Industry organisation the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has reported a strong lemon

season for this year, marked by the larger size of the crop and the earlier timing of the season's course, which are unusual by historical standards.

The current export estimate figure for the entire lemon season remains unchanged at 49.4-million 15 kg cartons.

The lemon season for the northern growing regions has effectively drawn to a close, with final volumes tracking closely with estimates produced throughout the season.

Elsewhere in the country, the increase was largely owing to increased rainfall that resulted in improved fruit size, the CGA says.

“This season has also produced an unusual packing pattern. For the first time, a significant number of Sundays River Valley producers completed close to 80% of their lemon crop by the end of June, which is a departure from previous seasons in which progress across the valley has typically been far more uniform,” says CGA vice-chairperson and Sundays River Citrus Company CEO Hannes de Waal.

The Sundays River Valley, in the Eastern Cape, widely regarded as one of the premier lemon-growing regions in the world, has shown significantly increased yields per hectare, which marks a recovery after two consecutive years of average crops, he adds.

The CGA anticipates the Sundays River Valley lemon season will draw to a close within about two weeks. Current assessments indicate the northern hemisphere lemon season will, in the next few weeks, not yet have reached the stage where it is able to fully replace southern hemisphere supply, the organisation notes.

Sundays River Valley growers have monitored the potential downstream impact of extreme weather events, including an intense windstorm, and remain aware of potential impacts to the relatively low volumes still to be packed in the valley.

Current fruit sizing means local growers are packing count 64 and smaller lemons for export, with larger fruit being directed to the three juice factories serving the valley.

This volume destined for processing may yet increase owing to a modestly improved lemon juice and oil price, which offers some additional returns for farmers, the CGA says.

Further, the timing of the Western Cape's lemon season mirrors that of the Eastern Cape, with a sudden tapering off expected soon.

However, the season is not without its pressures, as the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is having a tangible effect on export routes and market access, particularly for Grade 3 fruit destined for Iraq.

The additional cost of transshipping through Türkiye has rendered those supply lines uneconomical, and very little Grade 3 fruit is currently being packed for that market and is instead being redirected to local juice factories at lower returns.

“Our growers are resilient, but the cost of geopolitical instability is real and it is felt on every farm. We are monitoring the situation closely, particularly as the northern hemisphere season approaches and market dynamics continue to shift,” says CGA Lemon Variety Focus Group chairperson Leroux Venter. 🇷🇺

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