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Supply chain industry body commends citrus export milestone but warns supply chain challenges could sour continued growth

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“Our citrus sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience in an increasingly volatile supply chain

environment. It is proof that South Africa produces world-class agricultural products, but exporters are operating in a highly disrupted and increasingly complex global logistics environment that is compounded by the local challenges,” SAPICS says. “For a country seeking economic growth, job creation and increased export competitiveness, fixing our supply chains and advancing supply chain management must be a national priority.”

Citrus Growers Association CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele said in a statement that despite the growth in exports, the industry is still

facing challenges in the current season, including the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on fuel costs and shipping routes, which is placing significant pressure on grower margins. He also said that growers face unpredictable prices and market dynamics, rising input costs, as well as market access issues such as high tariffs.

Echoing and expanding on these concerns, SAPICS says that the pressure on South African exporters has intensified over the past few years. "Global shipping route disruptions, geopolitical tensions in key trade corridors, port congestion, rising freight costs and infrastructure inefficiencies have all contributed to greater uncertainty across export supply chains. For perishable products such as citrus, timing and reliability are critical. Delays at ports, cold-chain interruptions or shipping schedule disruptions can have major financial consequences and threaten valuable international customer relationships. At the same time, global buyers are demanding greater speed, transparency, sustainability and traceability across supply chains."

SAPICS contends that the ability to move goods efficiently, predict disruptions and respond quickly has become a competitive advantage in itself. The challenge extends beyond ports and shipping lines. Export supply chains depend on multiple interconnected systems functioning effectively, including transport infrastructure, warehousing, cold-chain management, customs processes, technology platforms and skilled professionals capable of managing complexity. "This is where supply chain management has become increasingly strategic," SAPICS stresses.

Historically viewed as an operational support function, supply chain is now central to business continuity, export growth and economic resilience. Companies are investing more heavily in logistics visibility, risk management, digital tools and contingency

planning as disruption becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Technology is also reshaping the sector. Artificial intelligence, predictive analytics and real-time tracking systems are helping businesses improve planning and respond faster to changing global conditions. However, these tools require skilled professionals who can interpret data, manage risk and make informed operational decisions.

SAPICS asserts that this creates both a challenge and an opportunity for South Africa.

“There is an urgent need to strengthen the country’s supply chain skills pipeline. As industries digitise and global supply chains become more complex, businesses need professionals with both operational expertise and digital capability.”

The supply chain sector offers diverse, exciting career opportunities across logistics, procurement, planning, warehousing, analytics and international trade. As export industries grow and supply chains become more sophisticated, demand for skilled professionals is expected to increase further.

If South Africa wants to position itself as a globally competitive export economy, supply chain performance can no longer be treated as a secondary issue, SAPICS states. “Efficient supply chains are economic infrastructure. Without resilient logistics networks and investment in skills, technology and collaboration, South Africa risks undermining its own export potential.

“The country has already proven that it can produce globally competitive agricultural products. The next challenge is ensuring that supply chains are equally competitive. In an era defined by disruption, countries that succeed will not simply be those that

produce goods efficiently, but those that can move them reliably, sustainably and competitively across the world.”

Since 1966, SAPICS has worked to elevate, educate and empower the community of supply chain professionals in South Africa and across the continent. This is done via membership, events, the annual conference and education courses and workshops through Authorised Education Providers and others. The annual SAPICS Conference is the leading event in Africa for supply chain professionals and is now in its 48th year. The 2026 SAPICS Conference takes place in Cape Town from 19 to 22 July 2026. 🇿🇦

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