"Indian buyers are ready to pay, but only for the right fruit"

Citrus buyers are becoming harder to impress

India's imported citrus market remains active, but buyers are becoming increasingly selective in recent seasons, says Arjun Singh, Co-Director of Agro Fresh International. According to him, the market is no longer driven simply by volumes or the lowest price. Instead, quality, shelf life, sweetness and arrival condition are influencing buying decisions.

Singh observes the conversation around imported citrus has evolved significantly. "India is no longer only a volume market. Earlier, importers focused mainly on how many containers were arriving. Today, buyers want to know the origin, the size, the brix, the colour, the shelf life and how the fruit performs after arrival. A smaller arrival of good-quality fruit can outperform a larger shipment of average fruit," he explains.

Among oranges, Egypt continues to dominate India's import market, particularly with Valencia oranges. Singh says Egyptian Valencia remains attractive because it combines good juice content and large volumes with a price point that works for Indian wholesale buyers.

South Africa, meanwhile, is gaining ground due to its consistency and post-harvest quality. "Indian buyers who are serious about shelf life, firmness and appearance are showing growing interest in South African citrus," he says.

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Australia occupies a more premium segment. "Australian oranges and mandarins are not always a mass-volume product because of the higher pricing, but they have strong appeal among premium retailers and quality-conscious consumers."

Mandarins are where Singh sees the most interesting developments: "The mandarin category is very promising in India, but it is also very sensitive," he says. "Buyers are extremely particular about sweetness, easy peeling, skin condition and shelf life. If the fruit arrives pale, acidic or soft, the market becomes very unforgiving."

This growing emphasis on quality is changing how importers operate. Singh says factors such as cold-chain management, pre-cooling, packaging and exporter relationships have become increasingly important. "For us, quality is not just about appearance; it's about the complete experience from how the fruit looks and tastes to how well it cuts and how long it lasts."

"The Indian market is slowly moving from 'cheap fruit first' to 'value fruit first'. Price is still important, but buyers are realising that the cheapest fruit is not always the best fruit. If the fruit has high wastage, poor colour, soft skin, or weak taste, the cheapest fruit quickly becomes the most expensive option."

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Weekly arrivals remain a key driver of pricing. Singh says the market reacts quickly to oversupply, especially when several origins arrive simultaneously. "When arrivals are controlled, and quality is strong, prices remain firm," he explains. "But even one or two weeks of surplus can put pressure on the market. Indian wholesale buyers are very alert and adjust their purchasing behaviour immediately."

"The market is active, but it is not blindly bullish. Buyers are ready to pay, but only for the right fruit," Singh observes, adding that Egyptian Valencia has remained relatively affordable, helping movement in the market, while South African and Australian citrus have maintained premium positioning.

Looking ahead, Agro Fresh International is particularly interested in expanding premium mandarin programmes from Australia and South Africa. Singh highlights varieties such as Murcott and Afourer, which offer the sweetness, colour and easy-peel characteristics increasingly preferred by urban Indian consumers.

"We believe the next stage of citrus imports in India will move beyond simply discussing origins to focus on branded programmes, traceability, consistent quality, and better consumer education. India has one of the most exciting fruit markets in the world, but it rewards those who understand its rhythm," Singh concludes.

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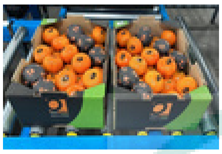
- 

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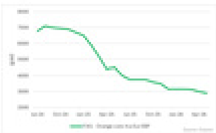
- 

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