

Citrus sector flags fuel risks ahead of 2026 export season

South Africa's citrus industry is raising concerns over fuel availability and rising costs ahead of the 2026 export season, warning that diesel shortages could disrupt logistics at a critical time for agricultural exports.



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As the citrus season prepares to ramp up from April, the Citrus Growers' Association of South Africa (CGA) says it is closely monitoring fuel supply risks linked to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

The industry has reported isolated diesel shortages at some service stations, despite assurance that national supply remains stable. These shortages are believed to be linked to unusual buying patterns and controlled allocation.

Call for coordinated response

The CGA has called for a coordinated national response involving government, fuel suppliers, logistics operators, growers, and exporters.

"Strong coordination, transparency, and contingency planning will be essential to ensure the upcoming season proceeds with as little disruption as reasonably possible.

"The government must take into account the important contribution of agriculture exports to the economy," said Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the CGA.

South Africa is the world's second-largest exporter of citrus, with the sector representing the country's largest agricultural export category.

Logistics system under pressure

The industry remains heavily reliant on road transport, with around 95% of the citrus crop moved by truck to ports. Continued diesel constraints could directly affect the supply chain.

"This points to the problems inherent in a logistics system almost wholly reliant on trucks. Over the longer term, greater freight rail activity is needed, and the CGA is grateful that private sector involvement in rail is progressing, but it needs to happen at a greater scale and a faster pace," Ntshabele.

Sector urges support and market access

The CGA has backed fuel-related interventions proposed by Agbiz, Agri SA and FIASA, while also calling for broader government support.

"Recent developments place additional strain on our sector, which supports 140,000 jobs at farm level. We therefore encourage government to assist in mitigating negative impacts and to create an enabling environment that supports the continued growth of the citrus industry.

"This includes action on improved market access to China, India, the United States and the European Union. We need better access and more markets now more than ever," Ntshabele said.

The CGA is expected to release its official 2026 season estimates soon, outlining projected export volumes.

