South African citrus exports face diesel supply risks

As the 2026 citrus season will shortly commence, the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) is closely monitoring fuel availability and cost due to the conflict in the Middle East. These factors will impact the upcoming citrus season, which begins in earnest from April.

The CGA has also received reports of isolated diesel shortages, which is concerning. While official assurances indicate that national supply remains stable, industry participants have reported limited diesel availability at certain stations, seemingly caused by unusual buying patterns and controlled allocation by industry players.

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The CGA emphasises the urgent need for an integrated national approach 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, and citrus is South Africa's largest agricultural export sector.

95% of the national citrus crop moves by road to ports. Should controlled selling or limited availability of diesel persist, it could directly affect the functioning of the citrus 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," said Dr. Ntshabele.

The CGA expresses its support for fuel measures recently proposed by Agbiz, Agri SA, and FIASA.

"Recent developments place additional strain on our sector, which supports 140 000 jobs at the farm level. We therefore encourage the 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," said Dr. Ntshabele.

The estimates for the 2026 citrus season will be published soon, giving an overview of expected volumes available for export.

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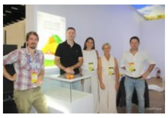

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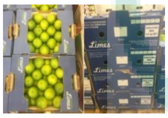

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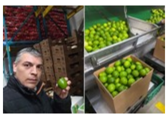

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