

South African citrus exports forecast to rise 3-5% in 2026 season

The latest Absa AgriTrends Report shows that climate volatility, shifting supply patterns, and trade policy uncertainty are continuing to shape the global citrus market ahead of the 2026 season.

According to the report, Northern Hemisphere citrus production for 2025/26 is forecast to decline by 1.51 per cent due to weather-related disruptions. Orange production is expected to fall by 2.16 per cent and lemons by 12.28 per cent, while soft citrus production is projected to increase by 5.91 per cent.

Spain recorded its smallest orange crop in 16 years following adverse weather during flowering, while Florida continued to face production challenges linked to Hurricane Milton, drought, and heat stress.

The report said tighter orange and lemon supply in the European Union could create short-term market opportunities for South African exporters.

South African citrus exports are forecast to increase by 3-5 per cent this season, supported by stable weather conditions and improved exportable fruit quality in key growing regions.

The report noted that South Africa has shifted focus back towards the fresh orange export market as global orange juice prices remain under pressure. Brazil is expected to increase orange production by 3.84 per cent to 13.5 million tons following improved weather and disease management, while Egypt continues to expand production through orchard maturation and processing investment.

Trade policy remains another area of uncertainty. The United States maintained duty-free access for South African oranges, although soft citrus was temporarily affected by a 30 per cent tariff before the introduction of a broader temporary tariff structure under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974.

The temporary extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) until late 2026 has also maintained market access, although exporters continue to face policy uncertainty.

According to the report, lemons currently present one of the stronger short-term export categories due to early-season timing and reduced Northern Hemisphere supply. Soft citrus, however, faces continued oversupply risks during peak periods.

The report also highlighted ongoing freight and logistics pressure linked to shipping disruptions and higher transport costs, while South-East Asia is increasingly viewed as an alternative growth market for citrus exports.

Source: FoodForMzansi (<https://www.foodformzansi.co.za/citrus-sector-enters-uncertain-season-as-trade-shifts-reshape-markets-agritrends1/>)

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