

South Africa is now the world's biggest citrus exporter

Despite [literal downpours](#) raining on South Africa's parade, the country's citrus industry is celebrating a new achievement: **overtaking Spain as the number one global exporter in the category.**



The milestone was attained with the publication of the African country's 2025 export season results, which reflected a total volume of **204 million 33-pound cartons**. In a [press release](#), South Africa's Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele celebrated the occasion, calling the sector-wide effort "a remarkable achievement."

"[The] government played a significant role in securing markets for the industry, while Transnet and other stakeholders ensured a steady flow through the ports to destinations around the world," he said.



Beyond pride, Ntshabele emphasized the importance of this milestone to the global industry at large, explaining that a strong South African citrus export season **ensures a complementary and continuous supply** of the fruit to Northern Hemisphere markets during their off-season.

“This, too, is a partnership built on supporting citrus as a fruit of choice for consumers,” he added.

Spain has been experiencing [weather difficulties](#) and production hurdles that have **significantly affected its productive capacity in recent years**. At the end of 2025, the Iberian citrus industry posted its [lowest production estimate in 16 years](#), calling on authorities to implement a “Marshall Plan” to support growers.

A steady but challenging South African 2026 citrus forecast

The CGA has updated its estimate for the current season to [include late mandarins](#), with numbers **remaining steady at 209.5 million 30-pound cartons**. This reflects a minimal 0.04 percent increase.

PACKED AND SHIPPED VOLUMES									
End of week 19 million 15 kg cartons	Packed	Packed	Packed	Shipped	Shipped	Original Estimate	Latest Prediction	Final Packed	Vision 260
SOURCE: PPECB/AGRIHUB	2024	2025	2026	2025	2026	2026	2026	2025	2026
Grapefruit	6.4 m	6.3 m	6.2 m	4.4 m	3.8 m	17.8 m	17.8 m	15.3 m	15.5 m
Lemons	11.4 m	11.4 m	16.3 m	9.4 m	11.7 m	45.9 m	46 m	41.6 m	43.4 m
Mandarins	6.1 m	4.4 m	7.5 m	2.9 m	3.1 m	52.7 m	52.7 m	53.5 m	50 m
Navels	1.3 m	0.5 m	1 m	0.2 m	0.1 m	30 m	30 m	31.6 m	32.3 m
Valencia	-	-	-	-	-	63 m	63 m	62 m	67.8 m
Total	25.2 m	22.6 m	31 m	16.9 m	18.7 m	209.4 m	209.5 m	204 m	209 m

The industry is optimistic about the revised forecast but notes significant hurdles, including trade disruptions in the Middle East and severe flooding affecting citrus-producing regions in the Western and Eastern Capes.

“Our citrus growers in the Gamtoos Valley were especially hard hit. They have our full support during this time,” the executive stated. “As a people and as an industry, we have faced challenges before, and we have repeatedly risen to show that we are equal to the challenges before us.”

**All images are referential.*

Related stories

[South African table grape exports remain steady despite logistical challenges](#)

[“The best is yet to come”: Optimism is driving South Africa's apple and pear industry](#)