South African citrus sector evaluates smart trucks for export growth

South Africa's citrus industry is moving closer to implementing Performance-Based Standards (PBS) vehicles as export growth places increasing pressure on logistics infrastructure.

Speaking at the Transport Forum hosted by Standard Bank in Durban, Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa logistics development manager Mitchell Brooke said traditional trucking models are becoming more difficult to sustain as export volumes increase across key corridors.

"We had 170 million cartons exported in 2024 and 203 million in 2025. This year's export estimate is sitting at 209 million," Brooke said.

The industry forecasts exports could reach around 260 million cartons by 2032/36, raising concerns around future transport capacity during peak shipping periods.

"If you are running continuous demand over 12 months, you have more capability to come up with solutions. The seasonality of our industry is something we continue to grapple with. We cannot invest in trucks for a three- or four-week period to manage that," Brooke said.

"We are going to have a problem with transport. In fact, this year might be the year we see that complication because we have such a huge production coming from the north."

According to the CGA, under a net-zero rail scenario, the Northern Corridor could require an additional 1,000 truck trips per week to move fruit to port, while the Eastern and Western Cape corridors combined would require another 1,400 weekly trips during peak season. Currently, approximately 4,400 weekly trips are undertaken across the three regions during the citrus season.

"It is important to break it down to corridor level," Brooke said. "Each corridor is highly specific in the way it runs its applications. We are also running fruit as far as 1,400 to 1,600 kilometres down to port."

Brooke added that container demand is also increasing. "Last year we got to 119,000 containers, and if we grow as we are predicting, we are going to need more than 162,000 containers."

The industry has been investigating PBS vehicles, also referred to as smart trucks, as part of efforts to improve freight efficiency along export corridors. According to Brooke, early investigations indicate that combinations transporting two 12-metre reefer containers may provide the most compatible solution for citrus and deciduous exports.

Trials within the citrus sector are expected to begin within the coming months to evaluate the operational viability of different PBS combinations.

PBS vehicles are designed around performance and safety standards rather than conventional vehicle dimension rules, allowing higher productivity combinations while maintaining road safety requirements.

Brooke also stressed that road transport alone would not resolve logistics constraints, adding that rail reform and infrastructure investment remain necessary as export volumes continue to grow.

Source: Freight News (https://www.freightnews.co.za/article/citrus-industry-closer-to-pbs-implementation)
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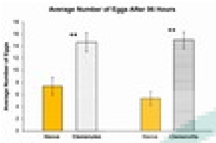

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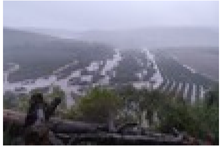

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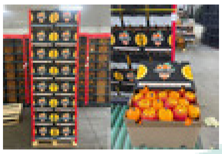

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