Grapefruit exports forecast to surge 16 per cent in South Africa

By Fred Meintjes | 18 May 2026

The country’s grapefruit sector is predicting substantial export growth this season, with shipments expected to reach 15.7mn cartons

Image: SummerStar Ruby

South African grapefruit exporters are predicting considerable growth in their shipments this year, with an estimate of 15.7mn cartons.

This is a 16 per cent increase from the 13.5mn cartons that were packed for export last year.

“The increase can mostly be attributed to optimal growing conditions; however, early feedback suggests a somewhat smaller fruit size,” the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) had previously announced.

Wet conditions in Northern areas initially disrupted early harvesting of grapefruit, CGA said.

The latest floods in the Eastern and Western Cape may also still affect prospects.

In its estimate, the CGA said favourable weather in the northern regions underpinned increased estimates of between 4 and 17 per cent above 2025 volumes.

The floods that occurred in January did not cause significant damage to orchards or affect yields.

An analysis of plantings of the various grapefruit categories reveals that by 2024 almost 90 per cent of the planted area consisted of Star Ruby grapefruit, with the older white varieties having almost vanished from the spectrum.

From a decade ago, the South African grapefruit sector has completely transformed itself.

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That is why the industry can now focus its marketing and promotion activities on Star Ruby, which is considered a new-generation category that suits young consumers.

In South Africa's traditional markets, grapefruit had been declining a decade ago. Under the headline of SummerStar Ruby, the country hopes that fortunes have finally turned around.

Together Europe and the UK represent just over 50 per cent of South African grapefruit sales.

Asia and South East Asia represent around 32 per cent with North America at around 9 per cent.

CGA said the new branding initiative aims to reposition grapefruit in Europe.

The mandate is to shift perceptions from bitter and old-fashioned fruit to sweet and tangy products that are relevant for young and modern consumers.

The 2026 European summer campaign, after a first successful season last year, is expanding into new markets, specifically France and Holland.

The branding and promotions initiative is another example of South African fruit growers and exporters drawing more consumers to their products.

In the Far East, specifically China and in India, the ClemenGold and Sweet-C brands for Mandarins, and the Flash Gala apple brand have already won great acclaim which is likely to spill over into other marketing regions and set new benchmarks in modern-day fresh produce branding.