

Malte Storjohann - Port International

South African growers have “special” connection to their farms

Port International's head of overseas procurement, Malte Storjohann, recently paid a visit to South African citrus growers in the Western and Eastern Cape as well as Limpopo to discuss the unfolding season and to form an idea of the crop developing on the trees.

The timing of the harvest is largely in line with previous years, he says, although lemons are slightly delayed compared to last year. "Overall, however, all categories are within the usual timeframe. The South African region fits perfectly into the global calendar, as it allows us to switch between the Southern and Northern hemispheres. For example, when the lemon season in Spain ends, the season in South Africa is just beginning."

In South Africa, Port International mainly focuses on citrus fruits (especially soft citrus, grapefruit, oranges, and lemons), blueberries, and grapes. The company's business is exclusively based on sea freight because, Storjohann points out, sustainability is a key focus.



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High demand for citrus across markets

"Lemons are particularly in demand every year and make up the largest share of our citrus portfolio. They are highly versatile in both gastronomy and households, which makes them especially popular. Oranges are also in strong demand, followed by soft citrus and grapefruit, as they are equally versatile."

He observes that the situation in the Middle East casts uncertainty over the course of the season. "However, at the beginning of the year, while we were still in the European season, the main citrus volumes were already shipped there. Volumes that would now typically go to the Middle East are currently being absorbed by strong demand from Europe."



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Although the blueberry season in South Africa only starts in September and the grape season is just about to end, with the new season expected in December, Storjohann emphasises the importance of maintaining regular personal contact with their growers to stay up to date. To that end, he visits their long-standing partners in South Africa regularly every year, while Port International's local site manager makes regular trips to Zimbabwe to maintain close contact with the blueberry farmers there. "Our partnership is based on trust, shared projects, and the values we hold in common, which has naturally also developed into a friendship over time. This includes, for example, our exclusive partner Rainbow Superfood in the blueberry sector, with whom we have been working successfully for many years."

Storjohann remarks on the close connection to nature he has witnessed among their South African growers. "Most of them are family businesses that have grown up on their farms. This means they not only know the region very well but also their products, which is clearly reflected in the quality," he explains, calling that connection a "special" one.



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For more information:



Malte Storjohann

Port International Group

Tel: +49 40 301000-541

Email: malte@port-international.com

www.port-international.com (<http://www.port-international.com>)

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