South Africa's citrus sector asks: who stabilises the stabiliser?

By Fred Meintjes | 9 November 2026

The CGA's Boitshoko Ntshabele says global demand for South African produce is not in question, but the clouds have gathered



Boitshoko Ntshabele
Image: CGA

In March of this year, South Africa's then minister of agriculture welcomed the latest Statistics SA gross domestic product figures, which positioned the agricultural sector as the primary engine of the country's economic resilience.

At the time, the minister said the results solidified agriculture's role as the "most significant stabiliser" of the South African economy.

Now, as the year draws to a close, the business is reflecting on agriculture's position.

"It is against this backdrop that I pause to reflect and take stock as we near the end of 2026," said Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the South African Citrus Growers Association.

"Can we still refer to agriculture as a stabiliser, or does the stabiliser now need stabilising?"

His comments come at the end of a very tough 2026 season, with growers and exporters still trying to reconcile all their returns.

"The global demand for South African produce is not in question, but the clouds have gathered," Ntshabele continued.

"Agriculture can continue doing what our sports teams do: deliver a deeply grounded, unyielding performance that transforms volatile pressure into sustainable growth.



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"Let's stabilise agriculture and not leave too much too late and to chance," he urged.

"It has been quite a year, and the central event, the war in the Middle East, is almost certain to remain a factor in 2027, casting a shadow over agriculture's prospects.

"The sector's growth and contribution have been export-led, and if exports diminish or become uncertain, growth is unlikely, and stability will suffer," Ntshabele predicted.

The summer is expected to be eventful, with erratic weather linked to the El Niño phenomenon.

In addition, agriculture continues to suffer from crumbling infrastructure and roads, a volatile currency, high input costs, poorly performing ports, and scarce shipping opportunities.

"Yet growers and their workers keep going, continuing to produce to feed the nation and fulfil global supply chain requirements, exporting to earn foreign revenue for our economy," he pointed out.

"Against this backdrop support must mean more than praising agriculture's resilience.

"It must mean addressing the infrastructure constraints (roads, ports and shipping) that make it harder for growers to reach their markets," Ntshabele added.

Despite these headwinds, South Africa's citrus industry still exported more than 200mn cartons in 2026, and industry leaders have said it is on track to meet its long-term objectives.

This is if, according to Ntshabele, the industry can find the same resilience as the country's sports teams, and turn tough situations into winning ones.

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