

Jacobus van der Merwe, Fruitworks

South Africa: Markets may come under pressure due to small sizes

The apple harvest started in the Free State back in week 3 and at the beginning of February in the Western Cape. "The Ceres area is really dry but the EGVV areas – (Elgin, Grabouw, Villiersdorp, Vyeboom) have sufficient water from the Theewaterskloof Dam," according to Jacobus van der Merwe from Fruitworks. "Due to the hot weather sizing is on the smaller side especially on the Gala, and the storage capabilities also won't be as good as previous years."

"Fruitworks focuses on the Asian and South East Asian markets with 80% of our export going to SE Asia. As for sizes normally Singapore will take 120-135 and Hong Kong 100-110 then Malaysia will take the smaller sizes, I suppose Malaysia will come under pressure due to the general small sizes this year," explains van der Merwe.

"We haven't started harvesting the Grannies yet or Fiji which is the preferred apple in these markets. If we can get some rain in the next week or two then we might get some slightly bigger sizes but there is no rain forecast at the moment."

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Fruitworks do send some apples and a bit of pears into Europe and the Packhams which have been already sent arrived with good quality and were well received, according to van der Merwe.

"We hope we can send some apples to China which opened for us last year, but they do prefer the bigger fruit and that may be a challenge this year, but we don't have great colour and you want to send big fruit with great colour to that market," said van der Merwe. "But we will wait for the Fujis and the Grannies before we decide."

Fruitworks do around 500 containers of apples a year. "We hope to increase volumes in the future, we have grown quite a bit as a company in the last few years and want to continue to do so. The whole South African topfruit market is growing and we want to grow with it."

"The African market has seen significant growth in the last few years but it is closely linked to the oil prices and I think Nigeria and Angola have been struggling for cash (US dollars), so I don't think the demand for Golden's will be as high as it has been in previous years," explained van der Merwe.

The Rand has been low for a while and gives good export conditions but this is off-set as South Africans have to buy capital resources in dollars, so it's not an ideal situation in the long term.

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