

Extra newsletter South Africa

On a recent visit to South Africa we met growers, packers and exporters. The main topic of conversation was, of course, the drought. It is affecting growers in every part of the country, some more than others. They will get through this season all be it with smaller sizes across the board and some types of fruit suffering sunburn but it will not be a disaster. The problem will be having enough water to produce a crop next year as there is hardly a dam in the country which is near its normal level, there is still hope of some rain in coming months but in some areas it will not enough.

"The drought in the North has been a problem for us this year" - Scott Dowle - Cape Citrus



"We have to be cautious that we don't create a tsunami of fruit in five years" - Stuart Symington - Capespan South Africa

The UK and EU have always been the traditional markets for South African fruit but it will come as no surprise that this is changing. While most exporters still say these are still the main markets everyone seems to be looking east into the Middle East and Asia and north at other African markets. They put it down to diversifying the markets and while the middle classes in many countries are certainly becoming more demanding and have the cash to spend on quality, fresh products one has to wonder how much other issues influence the move in exports. Retailers in the UK are notorious for their high specifications and low prices, while the Dutch are said to be taking advantage of the exchange rate to increase their profits and then there is the regulations on Citrus Black Spot which have cost the industry millions of Rand in the last few years it is hardly surprising the South African are looking elsewhere.

"We started exporting citrus to the east 5 years ago" - Nico Kotze - Bonaire



Another common theme was rising production costs: labour and power rates are increasing while raw materials need to be paid for in Dollars which is very expensive at the current exchange rate.



"Bringing emerging crops to new markets certainly has its challenges"- Elrita Venter of Freshness First

The producers are also expanding their product range and some more traditional crops are being ploughed in. Lemons and avocados are the seeing the biggest growth which is no surprise as these are the hottest items on the global fresh produce market at the moment. But others such as blueberries, persimmons, pomegranates, sweet potatoes and dates are also seeing a surge in acreage.

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