

Unexpected climatic conditions in South Africa over recent months have led to a grapefruit season that has been 'anything but normal', according to an industry head.

In a weekly newsletter, Citrus Growers Association (CGA) of Southern Africa CEO Justin Chadwick said late rains had caught much of the industry by surprise.

"Early indications of a low volume crop of smaller fruit followed a hot and dry summer. Late rains in March resulted in increased sizing – catching most of the trade by surprise," he said.

"Importers who had been cautioned about small size fruit suddenly found themselves short of smaller fruit."

In addition to the issues with rain, winter also arrived late in the grapefruit-growing regions, delaying color development.

"Grapefruit growers are very aware of the importance of only supplying what the market wants and so delayed packing until the colour was right," he said.

"This resulted in a low volume of early fruit, and more of a peak as the colour developed."

The Grapefruit Focus Group recently dropped its prediction for 2016 by another 2.5% to 12.1 million cartons – a reduction of 25% from 2015.

The Forum warned of an 'abnormally early finish' to the season and suggested that packers and importers managed their stocks carefully so as not to run short of fruit later in the season.

Brexit could be 'positive' for South African citrus

In the CGA newsletter, Chadwick also said that although a vote by U.K. citizens to leave the European Union on Thursday (June 23rd) would create a 'complex' situation, the South African citrus could benefit from such a development.

"At present the UK is governed by EU plant health regulations; as a result measures are in place that restrict citrus trade with the UK despite that fact that there is not one hectare of citrus in that country," he said.

"So there are no plant health risks (incidentally there are no plant health risks in southern EU member states which is the subject of a scientific dispute).

"A Brexit would result in revision of UK plant health regulations which would be positive for southern hemisphere citrus."

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