

RSA breaks soft citrus record

Record volumes of the fruit are exported by South Africa during the 2016 campaign

A record volume of 12.2m cartons of soft citrus, around 183,000 tonnes, were packed for export this year by the South African citrus industry, some 1m cartons more than original seasonal estimates.

Satsumas reached 1.9m cartons compared to the estimate of 1.8m cartons, clementines delivered a crop of 3.1m cartons from a forecast of 2.7m, while mandarins grew from an estimate of 6.7m cartons to 7.2m.

The original estimate showed a static trend for both satsuma's (2014 1.8m; 2015 1.7m) and clementines (2014 3.2m; 2015 2.5m). However, mandarins were expected to continue with their increasing volume trend (2014 5m; 2015 5.8 m), which in the end resulted in the most significant growth in the category.

"Excellent market conditions and good quality saw all three categories surpass estimates and 2015 levels, resulting in a record 12.2m-carton soft citrus crop [183,000 tonnes]," said the country's Citrus Growers Association (CGA). "The season was characterised by good demand and excellent quality – leading to strong markets and good returns."

The UK and Europe received 65 per cent of the larger crop, which was up 2 per cent compared with the previous season. Exports to the UK and Europe combined increased from 5.9m to 7.3m cartons.

The CGA said South East Asia also experienced an increase in volume, topping 1.1m cartons. North America showed growth, from 800,000 cartons last year to 1.1m this year, while the CGA noted that these increases were at the expense of Russia, which dropped from 0.9m to 0.7m cartons. Africa (0.3m) and Middle East (0.7m) remained static.

Observers say the soft citrus category is expected to grow with breeding programmes reporting exciting new cultivars which could be released soon. For the moment, the most focus will be on the growth in Tango mandarins, which have reportedly been planted widely in South Africa, and along with Nardorcot, which is mainly packed under the brand Clemengold, will dominate growth in the category.

Recently, a new variety named Leanri has been launched, which is expected to extend the mandarin marketing season. Leanri will be harvested after the present Clementine season but before Tango and Nardorcot. It is being commercialised by Citrogold in South Africa and Biogold International in other parts of the world.

Leanri offers the owners of the Clemengold brand the opportunity to extend this successful brand in future.

Production is also expected to be boosted in future when access to the lucrative Chinese market will be improved for South African soft citrus with new protocols being negotiated which will create more opportunities for the category.

