

Positive outlook overall, except for early navels

South Africa: Citrus export estimates for 2017

The 2017 citrus export estimates aren't that dissimilar to those of 2015, says the CEO of the Citrus Growers Association, Justin Chadwick. A total of 122,809,304 15kg-cartons are expected for export purposes, with some spectacular increases.

Valencias

The Valencia estimate in the Hoedspruit region, for instance, will go up by 95%, to more than 5 800 000 cartons. "Last year the Hoedspruit area was badly affected by hail, so this year's figures is a correction to last year's poor harvest, and a bit extra," explains Fanie Meyer, the CGA Hoedspruit representative. There are also young trees coming into production this season. Overall Valencia export figures are pegged at 19% higher than 2016 (50 million cartons versus 42 million cartons). Other regions seeing sizable jumps in their Valencia export figures are Swaziland (up by 90%), Zimbabwe (up by 39%) and Nelspruit (up by 28%).



Lemons

The lemon harvest is similarly buoyant, with all regions reporting optimistic estimates, for instance a 94% increase in the Orange River region from a low base of about 89 000 cartons to almost 173 000 cartons, due to new orchards coming into production. In the Onderberg area of Mpumalanga there is a projected 47% increase. In the largest lemon production areas of the Sundays River Valley (Eastern Cape) and Senwes (Groblersdal and Marble Hall), increases of 16% and 29% respectively are expected, reflecting an expansion in lemon orchard acreage. Overall an 18% addition to South Africa's lemon exports are expected (resulting in 17.5 million cartons), which, it is felt, will necessitate the opening of further export markets.



Soft citrus

Soft citrus producers have an equally positive outlook, as their estimates are 16% higher (13 222 340 cartons) than the 12.1 million cartons of soft citrus exported last year. There will be an increase in specifically late mandarins, as many newcomers to the citrus industry are turning to late mandarins in response to the woes of the South African wine and fruit processing industry. Indeed, it is reckoned that there is currently a fivefold expansion in mandarin orchards taking place, with a doubling in volumes possible by 2023.

Grapefruit

An estimate of 13.4 million cartons are forecast for grapefruit, a healthy increase of almost 2 million cartons. Of this, the vast majority are red grapefruit (12 million) and the balance white grapefruit. Zimbabwe's grapefruit production is also up, but Swaziland's is down.

Navels

The minor chord in an otherwise upbeat song is navels, specifically early navels. "We're very worried," Snyman Kritzing of Grown4u in the Eastern Cape tells *FreshPlaza*. "The Eastern Cape has some of the best navels in South Africa but we're going to have a very difficult year. We're expecting a dramatic drop in class 1 navels and navel prices can rise tremendously. We had a lot of wind during blossoming and fruit set and now we're seeing much wind damage: fruit with open holes and blemishes. Excessive heat has also affected yields. Good product can be 30 to 35% less." This concern is reflected in the estimates: for all navels (early, late and Cara Cara) the Sundays River Valley estimates a 20% drop in exports. Patensie expects a 7% drop, the Eastern Cape Midlands a 10% drop.

The decrease will be offset by export increases of 21% and 9% in, respectively, the Senwes region and the Western Cape. The Senwes region will then be the major navel producer in the country. A total of 26.3 million cartons of navels are expected, a mere 1% improvement on drought-afflicted 2016.

There are fewer and fewer early navel orchards in South Africa as growers turn to late navels, Midknights, lemons or late mandarins. "Navels traditionally don't make money for farmers," says Kritzingner.

CGA Region	Valencia (15kg)	Navels (15kg)	Lemons (15kg)	Soft citrus (15kg)	Grapefruit (17kg)	Total Citrus (15kg)
S.R. Valley	6 500 000	5 000 000	8 000 000	1 485 000	200 000	21 211 667
Senwes	5 400 000	7 285 830	3 610 000	706 000		17 001 830
Letsitele	11 774 000		220 000	185 000	4 000 000	16 712 333
W. Cape	4 800 000	7 128 000	700 000	2 509 977		15 137 977
Hoedspruit	5 843 000		830 000	1 100	3 644 000	10 803 967
Patensie	2 200 000	3 400 000	720 904	2 082 700	200 000	8 630 270
Nelspruit	2 900 000	1 950 000	600 000	1 495 000		6 945 000
Limpopo River	5 000 000		370 000	40 500	1 125 000	6 685 500
Boland	200 000	295 000	1 200 000	3 501 810		5 196 810
Onderberg	1 160 000		40 000	-	2 278 585	3 782 396
E. Cape Midlands	50 000	850 000	490 000	1 062 773		2 452 773
Oranje Rivier	464 049		172 810	127 980	1 058 243	1 964 181
Nkwalini	170 000		230 000	22 000	714 000	1 231 200
S-KZN	185 000	205 000	222 000	-		612 000
Pongola	70 000		95 000	-	186 000	375 800
VaalHarts	50 000	212 000	30 000	2 500		294 500
Other		-	-	-	-	-
Zimbabwe	2 850 000				145 000	3 014 333
Swaziland	440 000				279 500	756 767
TOTAL	50 056 049	26 325 830	17 530 714	13 222 340	13 830 328	122 809 304

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