

Southern African citrus on the up

Exports of citrus from Southern Africa are expected to return to 2015 levels this season

Southern Africa is expected to export some 122 million cartons of citrus fruit this season. The bulk, around 119 million cartons will be shipped by the South African industry, while Zimbabwe will contribute 3 million cartons and Swaziland 800 000 cartons.

South Africa is on the brink of steep rises in citrus production over the next season, according to industry experts, and total exports could rise by another 8m cartons in 2018.

This year, production in the north of the country will return to normal after being affected by drought in 2016, while the effect of drought in the western parts of the country is only expected to be felt next year.

While Valencias will more or less return to levels seen two years ago, record lemon and soft citrus crops are predicted this campaign.

South Africa's Citrus Marketing Forum (CMF) says the Valencia estimate is 50m cartons – up from the drought and hail impacted 2016 result of 42m. This is however less than the record 2015 of 52.7m cartons.

The most significant Valencia increases are predicted in Hoedspruit which almost doubles after devastating hail decimated the 2016 crop; Letsitele where hot, dry conditions impacted on 2016 (18 per cent increase); and Nelspruit where the increase is 28 per cent.

Navel volumes are trading water at 26m cartons and the prediction is very similar to the previous three years. Dry conditions in the Eastern Cape have resulted in lower estimates in the East Cape Midlands (down 10 per cent); Patensie (down 7 per cent) and Sundays River (down 20 per cent).

However, the north makes up for the lower Eastern Cape navels volumes with Senwes up 21 per cent and Nelspruit up 10 per cent.

The CFM says hot dry conditions prevailing in the Western Cape have not impacted on 2017 navel estimates, but the effect will be felt in 2018. The Western Cape predicts an increase of 9 per cent. Overall the navels will be slightly lower compared with last year, while the volumes of later navels will increase slightly.

The lemon crop is set to hit a record 17.5m cartons, which is an increase of 16 per cent from 2015 and 2016's 15m cartons. The CMF says all regions are expected to show growth, with Hoedspruit (37 per cent), Senwes (29 per cent) and Sundays River (16 per cent) being the most significant.

The soft citrus category is expected to rise by 16 per cent from 12.1m to a record 13.2m cartons. The most significant growth is expected in the Senwes, Nelspruit (which includes Burgersfort and Ohrigstad) and Sundays River regions.

Grapefruit volumes return to 2015 levels with an estimate of 13.8m, which is an increase of 14 per cent from last year's volume of 12.1m cartons.