

South Africa: Citrus farming for export against the odds

Close to the Magalies mountains in the Northwest Province of South Africa, Willem van Schalkwyk of SVS Boerdery grows citrus for export, the only citrus farmer in the area to do so.

His packhouse has a daily capacity of 100t and therefore his citrus production is tightly planned to avoid overlap between the varieties: he is now in the last two weeks of lemons, which will be followed by a month of Novas, then Navels (Palmer and Bahianinha) and then Valencia's (Turkey and Benny). When they are packed, it's time for the Midnights and lastly Deltas.

He is also going to add Nadorcotts to his portfolio.

In the summer rainfall area of the Mooi-nooi district where he farms, black spot is a problem, particularly since his orchards are surrounded by citrus orchards whose fruit are destined for juicing and therefore not subject to the same rigorous pest management regimen of an export farmer. He undertakes chemical measures and orchard hygiene, against both black spot and false codling moth, but even so the incidence of black spot is too high for him to consider export to the European Union.

Hail is another challenge to citrus farming in this area, the reason why most of his neighbours opt for growing for processing.

Through Safpro and Emex he exports to Russia, the Middle East and Canada. "Fruit size determines allocation to the export markets, for instance Russia wants the larger sizes. We're seeing a bigger demand in the Middle East before Ramadan but I expect that prices are going to fall after Ramadan," he says. He is planning to install an optic fruit sizer in order to cater for the sensitive Far Eastern market.



He also markets directly to retailers, including ascending Botswana retailer Choppies, which takes all of his varieties, with the exception of lemons. His location puts him in the ideal situation to take advantage of Botswana's stable economy. Furthermore, he also sends citrus to the fresh produce markets in Gauteng.

The drought hasn't had as big an impact on his production as the heat waves of the past summer have: fruit set was adversely affected and he saw a higher than normal incidence of fruit drop in November. Due to fewer fruit, the size on the

remaining fruit might be larger, which could mean more fruit to the Russian market.

The harvest is down on all his cultivars, but at least not as drastically as last year: "In 2016 our harvest was down by 50%, this year it looks like about 25%. Class 1 is down a lot, we'll be packing a lot more class 2 and there will be a lot of class 3, which will go to the local market or taken for juicing."

Economically, it's a fine line to decide between the fresh produce markets and juicing. He estimates that the labour costs when picking citrus for export are a third higher than when picking for juicing, and even more so when picking Novas which are snipped from the tree with scissors. As for the decision between whether class 3 fruit are sent to the local markets or to the Magalies Citrus juicing plant, which is just down the road from him, packaging costs are a big consideration.

Van Schalkwyk is a very busy man – his 170 000 citrus trees form only part of his farming enterprise: poultry farming, game farming and instant lawn production take up the rest of his time.



For more information:

Willem van Schalkwyk

SVS Boerdery

Tel: +27 14 572 3866

Email: willem@svsboerdery.co.za

Publication date: 5/16/2017

Author: Carolize Jansen

Copyright: www.freshplaza.com

Fresh
Plaza

© 2017 FreshPlaza. All rights reserved.

