

Justin Chadwick - Citrus Growers' Association

South African lemons to EU down 20%

South African exporters, wary of the implications of citrus black spot interceptions on the entire South African citrus campaign in Europe, are playing it safe and sending their lemons to Russia, the Middle East and Asia, with a drop of 20% in the amount of lemons destined for the EU compared to 2016.



"Due to technical barriers to trade the EU has received far fewer lemons (12%) than 2016 (32%)," says Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association. By contrast, the proportion of lemons going to Russia has increased by 11% (17% of the volumes already shipped), to Asia it has increased by 6% (19% of the whole) while the Middle East is currently taking a chunky 47% of shipped lemon volumes, up by 4%. "The Middle East is a very important market for the South African citrus industry, especially early in the season."

Of the 6.9 million 15kg cartons of lemons packed by the end of week 20, 5.2 million cartons have been shipped, on par with last year.

CGA reaction to US re-entry of Argentinian lemons

Justin Chadwick considers the recent decision to re-allow Argentinian lemons to the US market a positive sign. "It sends out an important message for international trade. From a trade perspective it shows an open attitude towards a recognition of technical ways to allow trade to continue while still protecting domestic production."

"The concern around pest and diseases is well-founded. We understand that concern - we never had the Oriental fruit fly until five or six years ago and we know that combatting a new pest adds a lot of cost and hassle to production. The US Department of Agriculture would have considered it carefully and worked out a procedure to minimise contagion of its domestic industry."

It is hoped that Argentinian lemons finding an outlet in the US, will take pressure off other markets, given that South African lemon production is set to double over the next five years.

Over the past year an additional 1,000ha of Eureka lemons have been planted while Lisbon plantings increased by 44%. (These figures might well underrepresent the true number as some traditionally non-citrus growers have converted vineyards and other agricultural land to lemon groves in response to the buoyant lemon outlook.)



In view of the upswing of production, Chadwick is optimistic about the Indian market. "We see it as having great future potential, for a number of reasons: its huge population, many of whom are vegetarian, with a strong culture of fruit and vegetable consumption, as well as a growing middle class. In the past there were some difficulties with the implementation

of regulations which sometimes differed between ports, but we have engaged a lot with the Indian authorities to understand the regulations and we have communicated that to our members. In addition, the Indian administration is centralising a number of activities which improves consistency."

There is currently a pilot citrus consignment to test the shipping requirements to India, similar to the pilot pear consignment of last year. "It's on the go, it'll be finalised as quickly as possible, hopefully before mid-June. For the time being the volumes won't increase significantly," Chadwick says.

Currently South Africa exports no lemons to the USA because of the cold treatment protocol on citrus (as well as grapes and stonefruit) required for that market, as a measure against false codling moth. It is well-known that lemons, while not a host to FCM, are particularly susceptible to chilling damage.

"We hope to eventually be able to export lemons to America under another protocol because they are open to scientifically-based arguments, but such a change could be years off," says Piet Smit of Favourite Fresh Exports who also sits on the board of Summer Citrus which represents South African citrus growers in the American market.

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