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South African lemon exports set to surpass forecast

South Africa's lemon exports are poised to exceed the pre-season growth forecast of 16%, with the latest prediction now standing at 18.5 million cartons.

In its latest update sent Friday, the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA) said the estimate had increased from 17.6 million cartons the previous week.

The new projection would mark a 23% year-on-year rise.

By the end of week 32, 17.7 million cartons had been packed and 16.8 million had been shipped.

The only other changes from the previous week's prediction were increases of 100,000 cartons for both grapefruit and Navels, which are now pegged at 15.6 million cartons and 20.1 million cartons respectively.

The current soft citrus estimate is 3% up from the initial forecast at 13.6 million cartons, while the Valencia projection is the same number of percentage points down at 48.5 million.

"As we get towards the tail end of the grapefruit and navel seasons, the final predictions have been increased slightly," CGA CEO Justin Chadwick said.

"In contrast, the Lemon Focus Group met yesterday and made significant upward adjustments to the estimate – now at 1 million cartons above initial estimate.

"There is some concern regarding the final Valencia volume – the Valencia Focus Group will meet to clarify the position."

Deceptively green growing areas

In the newsletter, Chadwick also said the Western and Eastern Capes were still in severe need of rainfall, despite how the situation may appear to a passerby.

He said a citrus industry veteran had last week told him in the Olifants River Valley: "Don't be fooled by how green it looks."

"On either side of the freeway green fields of young shoots spread out as far as the eye can see – but this picture hides the true situation. The Western Cape is experiencing its driest year in over 100 years (some say 130). Dam levels are extremely low," he said.

“The Eastern Cape is experiencing similar conditions. The Sundays River region gets its water from the Gariep dam in the Free State, which is at 72% full – and therefore from an irrigation point of view there is sufficient water, but all growers will tell you that orchards fare much better when watered by nature, and the Eastern Capes winter rainfall was well below average.

“Patensie region is a different picture – with dams at critically low levels; the Kouga dam is at 16% of capacity.”

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