

RSA citrus closes in on forecast

South African citrus is just short of its seasonal target as the campaign winds down

South African citrus export volumes is expected to get close to the original season forecast despite the effect of drought and other problems on growers in various areas.

With the last weeks of shipping at hand, it is predicted that the country will send just over 118m cartons this season, which will be just below the original 2016/17 estimate of 122.7m cartons, but nearly 10m cartons higher than last season.

Grapefruit, at 15.7m cartons, has ended almost 1.7m cartons higher than last season while soft citrus (13.8m cartons) is showing a significant increase on the forecast and lemons are expected to end up 1m cartons over the estimate.

Valencia oranges, the biggest part of the crop, will end up about 1m cartons short of the estimate of 50.1m cartons.

The only sector that has not really performed well is navels, which at 21m cartons will be about 5m cartons down on last year.

Observers say the South African citrus industry is still in a growth spurt that will see it reach 130m cartons a season soon. The most important contributors to this will be soft citrus and lemons, which have seen heavy new plantings in recent years.

Asian growth

Meanwhile, the Citrus Growers' Association's Justin Chadwick said South African citrus was stamping its mark in Asia.

"This is despite many competitive imbalances," he explained. "Competitors have supportive governments negotiating a myriad of partial and free trade agreements, giving their traders a distinct advantage."

Nevertheless, he noted, the unique taste, excellent quality and range of product, coupled with dedicated exporters who go the extra mile, as well as attractive pricing, have resulted in South Africa being the Southern Hemisphere's number one citrus exporter to Asia.

"As efforts to optimise access conditions gain results, South African fruit exports to Asia will grow," he added.

With the season ending, growers in the Western Cape will be worrying about water supplies to set their next crop. The region is the biggest supplier to the US market and has been subjected to a prolonged drought which is causing major concern.

