

South African citrus industry achieves record exports

Southern African citrus exports have now surpassed the 2015 figure to hit a record this season, in what has been described as a successful campaign on the whole that saw good returns for most

categories.

With a couple of weeks still left to go for some commodities, total packed volume at the end of week 38 stood just shy of 120 million 15-kilo cartons (1.8 million metric tons), surpassing 2015's 118.4 million cartons.

The latest prediction is for 121.9 million cartons, against an original estimate of 122.7 million.

The decrease on the forecast is due to a significant reduction in Navel volume related to [fruit drop](#) that was largely offset by increases for lemons, Valencias and soft citrus.

Lemon exports are now forecast to reach 19 million compared to the original estimate of 17.5 million, while Valencias are expected to finish up 2.1 million cartons higher on 52.2 million and soft citrus is pegged 400,000 higher at 13.8 million.

Navel volumes have fallen by some five million cartons against initial forecasts to 21.2 million, while grapefruit ended up slightly higher than the projection of 15.6 million.

Speaking to *Fresh Fruit Portal*, Citrus Growers Association (CGA) of Southern Africa CEO Justin Chadwick said that following the Navel fruit drop many had anticipated the final citrus export level to finish well short of the 122 million mark.

"At one stage people were talking about 112 million cartons as being a possible figure, but I think people didn't realize the extent to which the lemons and soft citrus would increase," he said.

"Then on the Valencia side the quality and packouts have been really good. The crop also came a week or so early, and that meant people could substitute Navels for Valencias."

Chadwick attributed the rise in lemon and soft citrus volumes to new plantings coming on stream and the Valencia increase due to good growing conditions in the northern regions.

Good price year

The representative noted not only were export volumes positive, but returns too.

"I've had a chat to a couple of the big players in the last week or so and it's not only the volume that's been good, but the returns in most markets have also been really good.

"Obviously there's always one or two markets which have been a bit more damaging, but in general the returns have been good. If one looks at the total revenue earned I would imagine it's going to be knocking on 20 billion rand (US\$1.5 billion) this year."

He said the only big disappointment market-wise had been with lemons, which were coming off a couple of years of strong prices. The Spanish lemon crop had also been large and late, affecting South African exporters.

Navel prices, on the whole, had also perhaps not been as high as many had hoped for following the production decline, Chadwick said.

"But overall, even in the Eastern Cape where the majority of the Navel drop occurred, people are saying it turned out a lot better than they thought it might have," he said.

The weakened rand also boosted exports this season, he added.

All in all, Chadwick said the season has had its challenges toward the start of the year, but looking back now it had been less problematic in terms of any phytosanitary concerns.

"There are always little issues that one has to deal with, but in general I think the risk management measures that have been put in place are well understood now and that's actually lifted our game – not only for EU exports but for exports around the world," he said.

"I think that does assist us in getting the volumes we do get into the market."

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