

Record year for Southern African citrus

Industry cements its position as the region's leading fresh produce sector, ahead of table grapes and topfruit

Citrus exports from Southern Africa are on course to reach a new record this season. With several weeks of the season still to go, figures from the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) on exports from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Swaziland show that almost 120m 15kg cartons have been packed, topping the 118.4m carton total reached in 2015.

The CGA said the final packed figure would not be far off the season's opening estimate of 122.7m cartons. Exports of soft citrus, lemons and Valencia are up, while Navel volumes are around 5m cartons down on last year's total.

The disappointing Navel crop was more than compensated by a surge in Valencia volumes, which are up by around 10m cartons compared to last year. Lemon exports are projected to reach 19m cartons, compared with 14.5m cartons in 2016.

Soft citrus exports are pegged at 13.8m cartons versus 11.1m cartons in 2016, while grapefruit is likely to end the season on 15.7m cartons compared with last year's total of 12.3m cartons.

"All regions experienced growth in terms of grapefruit volumes," said the CGA, "however the market distribution was slightly different compared with last year."

The European Union was the biggest importer of grapefruit, receiving 5.5m cartons compared to last year's 5.2m cartons, but overall the market accounted for a slightly lower share of overall exports than last year (41 per cent versus 45 per cent).

By contrast, Asia accounted for 23 per cent of grapefruit exports, up from 20 per cent in 2016.

Grapefruit shipments to North America increased from 500,000 cartons to 600,000 cartons, while exports to the Middle East also increased slightly from 330,000 cartons to 350,000 cartons.

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