

South Africa: 2018 kumquat season gets underway

South Africa is the most important supplier of kumquats to Europe and the UK during the Northern summer and the export season has started with a crop expected to be on par with last year's.

With strong Spanish supplies remaining in the market for longer, the South African season got off to a slow start, but nothing that has disrupted their marketing schedule, says Stephen Beghin of Premier Fruit Exports, based in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

"We wait for the fruit to be full-coloured because we do not degreen our kumquats. We don't want the chemical on the fruit. European legislation classifies kumquats separately from citrus fruit because of its edible peel, so we have invested heavily in our post-harvest treatment to allow conformity with European law."

The kumquat acreage in South Africa, primarily in Limpopo Province, remains stable. Last season's export volume handled by Premier Fruit Exports was around 100,000 equivalent 2kg cartons. The fruit go mostly to the EU and the UK, as well as the Middle East, Russia, Canada and Indian Ocean islands.



In one sense, kumquat marketing is simpler because size doesn't play the same cardinal role as in other citrus categories. On the other, South African kumquats enter the European market during their summer months when competition from other summer fruit is stiff. "We try to find a niche for kumquats and we work with selected supermarkets and arrange promotions," Stephen says.



He believes that the health properties of kumquats are what makes it good value. "Kumquats have a high Vitamin C content, so eating kumquats promotes cell growth and boosts one's immune system. Kumquats are loaded with fibre, which helps control bad cholesterol (LDL), while promoting the production of good cholesterol (HDL)," he says. "Snacking on kumquats can help boost one's energy, and prevent inflammation, as kumquats have plenty of iron and other minerals."

Contrary to other citrus fruit, the sweetness of kumquats lies in the skin and it is often eaten raw in the Far East, while in the West it is mainly cooked, with added sugar. "Kumquats are a refreshing accompaniment with ice cream, as its strong citrus flavours can leave the palate feeling clean."

He notes that kumquats make a very good cocktail, using ice, Grand Marnier liqueur and vodka. "The perfect way to celebrate the World Cup football this summer!" he jokes.

The South African kumquat season runs until early November.

For more information:

Stephen Beghin

Premier Fruit Exports

Tel: +27 31 767 3875

Email: stephen@pfe.co.za



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Author: Carolize Jansen

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