

South African citrus forecast rises

With around 25 per cent of the 2018 Southern African citrus crop shipped, industry leaders have increased their forecast

In what is expected to be another record volume year, South Africa's Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) says the grapefruit and soft citrus crops are likely to increase by around 2m cartons and 1m cartons respectively this campaign.

The bulk of Southern African shipments come from South Africa, while volumes from Zimbabwe and Swaziland are also included.

The total crop forecast has now reached 133m cartons, which is around 10m cartons more than last year's final shipments.

It is expected that the country will now ship almost 18m cartons of grapefruit and 16.4m cartons of soft citrus.

The lemon forecast is now slightly lower than originally estimated. In the cases of both lemons and grapefruit, more than half the forecast volume has already been shipped.

"As grapefruit starts to colour up, so the rate of packing has stepped up," says the CGA. "Our Grapefruit Focus Group met this past week and increased their prediction, which is now a million cartons over the original estimate. Soft citrus packing is also ahead of 2017, and the Soft Citrus Focus Group has made another upward adjustment to its prediction."

The CGA also says that the labour problems in the Eastern Cape affected lemon and navel picking and packing, with lemon packing lagging behind the figures achieved at the same time during the 2017 season. It also says that the Valencia season got off to a slow start.

The Valencia crop represents around 40 per cent of the total crop and is expected to dominate the second half of the year. For both Valencias and Navels the forecast is now slightly lower than originally expected.

Meanwhile, the late mandarin season is now also underway and will form a significant part of the soft citrus campaign.

The CGA says good winter rains have lifted the mood of growers in the Western Cape region where the persisting drought has caused major problems.

"This heralds a return to normal for the winter rainfall region," the CGA says. "Dams in that region are now above similar levels compared to last year – while many will say that they are not out of the woods, the rains are a welcome relief."

The CGA says a bit further up the coast in the Eastern Cape, the Patensie/Gamtoos region is facing dire conditions as the Kouga dam stands at 7.6 per cent compared to last year's 18.5 per cent.

