

South African Ag Minister anticipates greater fruit exports to U.S.

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South African Agriculture Minister Senzeni Zokwana has pledged his support to the fruit sector exporting to the U.S., saying there is room to grow.

He made the commitment was during last week's Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fresh Summit event held in Orlando, Florida, which brings together more than 20,000 industry participants.

Speaking at the official opening of the summit, Zokwana announced that current negotiations are in the final stages for extending citrus access and granting avocado access.

He added that the U.S. has applied for export permits of apples and berries for the South African market.

"These interventions only present a path for industry to utilise emerging opportunities for trade," Zokwana said.

South Africa exports 2.7 million metric tons (MT) of fresh fruit annually to about 100 countries, to the value of US\$3.4 billion.

Although only 4% of that volume currently goes to the U.S., Zokwana envisaged that the figure would grow substantially due to the recently awarded access for litchis, the "imminent" wider access for citrus fruit to the U.S., the potential market access for avocados to the U.S.

It also said the potential import of table grapes, pears, and apples through the Port of Virginia could lead to export growth.

The U.S. indicated in June that it would soon allow citrus imports from all regions. At present only growers in the Western and Northern Cape are eligible to ship to the U.S. market. The South African Government has said exports from these areas should start in 2019.

Zokwana said that the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) also has a good and long-standing working relationship with the U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS).

He said that through engagements with APHIS, South Africa intends to increase in volumes of fruit exported.

“The government of South Africa is fully committed to supporting and sustaining a world-class supply chain system for the South African fresh produce and perishables sector. This can only be achieved by good relations with strategic partners which includes the USA,” he said.

“As counter seasonal producers, there is a potential good match in fresh produce trade between South Africa and the United States. Especially, the South African fruit industry has a highly sophisticated supply chain that exports to sophisticated markets all over the world including the USA, the European Union and China.”

The Minister added that South Africa is promoting diversity of fruit exports including the new consignments of berries recently exported to the U.S.

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