

EUROFRUIT



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Citrus export decline confirmed

Final South African citrus forecast shows mixed bag across different categories

After some years of consistent and rapid growth in exports, the 2019 South African citrus season is developing into a somewhat disappointing and mixed bag of a campaign.

While lemons and soft citrus show continued growth, grapefruit, Navel oranges and Valencia oranges are down on last year.

The final export volume is expected to be 127.4m cartons, down around 10m cartons on last year's 137.2m cartons. Navel oranges, down 11 per cent and Valencia oranges, down 13 per cent, had the biggest influence. Grapefruit was also down by 6 per cent.

The Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) says an alternate 'on-off' year in terms of yield seems to be the main reason for orange and grapefruit volumes being down, particularly in the northern regions.

Although the northern regions of South Africa in general had a disappointing season for Navels and Valencias, the Senwes region suffered a massive drop, according to the CGA.

"They are down 33 per cent on their record 8.9m carton Navel crop last year and almost 40 per cent on their similarly huge 8.2m cartons Valencia packing in 2018," the group said. "Apart from the decrease in yields, growers from this region were faced with lower packouts due to wind scarring, smaller fruit and poor colour."

The CGA says the poor colour development, particularly for late Valencias, was a common theme for the northern regions.

Limpopo River, Hoedspruit, Zimbabwe and Eswatini (Swaziland) all look to finish around 20 per cent down on Valencias compared with last year.

"The Eastern Cape regions, on the other hand, packed very similar volumes to those of last year," says the CGA. "Looking for the positives, the lower export volumes saw improved prices in the markets, particularly as the season progressed. Late recovery in prices in the Chinese and Russian markets relieved what looked to be developing into a calamitous year for the grapefruit growers and exporters. Valencia prices are currently good in all markets."

The CGA says that due to the growing hectares of lemons and soft citrus in the country, these commodities are expected to finish 2 and 3 per cent up on estimate. This will be 13 and 17 per cent up on 2018 respectively.

The CGA says market reports indicate that 2019 is the longest Northern Hemisphere orange and lemon season to date with some European retailers switching to South African fruit later and later in the season, or not at all.

"Soft citrus exports got off to a rocky start with satsumas performing poorly although the clementine volumes compensated to some extent to give Europe and the UK a steady supply. The growth in Nova volumes was directed mainly to non-European markets."

The CGA says it will report later on the development of the late Mandarin season, which is a strongly growing category in the South African citrus export basket.

