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World lemon production under the spotlight

Argentina and Spain continue to dominate word lemon production

Figures released by the South African Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) from 2016/17 paint an interesting picture of global lemon production.

Two of the top producers do not export any of their lemons. They are China and Italy, and In the case of Italy one must assume that the CGA's figures refer to exports outside the European Union.

Spain, Turkey, South Africa and Chile are all heavily dependent on exports – with over 50 per cent of production being shipped overseas. Of the top ten producing countries only China and Italy do not have exports of any significance. Argentina has a large processing component, and the US has a big domestic market.

South Africa produces 309,000 tonnes of lemons and exports 237,000 tonne, some 77 per cent of its lemons, indicating how important overseas markets are for the country. These markets will even become more crucial as the country's production of lemons grows during the next few years – lemons is one of the leading citrus categories in South Africa experiencing significant growth.

South Africa's total production of lemons is far short of that of Argentina (1.68m tonnes) and Spain (1.16m tonnes).

On the import side Russia is a sizeable player. Germany is the top European Union importer of lemons, with France second, and many EU countries are found in the top ten importers.

The Middle East also imports good volumes, with much of this routed through Saudi Arabia.

China features amongst the top ten producers and top ten importers. Saudi Arabia ranks fourth, followed by the Netherlands, Italy, Poland and China.

Imports of lemons into China represents only 13 per cent of China's own production and is one of the reasons why South Africans see great potential for their lemons in the country.