

**Eric Conta – DKI Fruit**

## **South African easy peelers in short supply for recovering African trade**

Easy peelers like Tangos and Nadorcotts are sought after in West Africa, but it's been difficult to get hold of the sizes – 1X to 3X – in the 10kg carton preferred by their clients, as it's the same size required for UK bagging programmes.

“You can feel there's a shortage in soft citrus and we're struggling to find the sizes that our clients are looking for,” explains Eric Conta of DKI Fruit, pointing out that they don't trade a lot of citrus, but that their clients in countries like Gabon, Senegal, Mali are at times able to compete in price with Europe and the UK, especially towards the tail-end of South Africa's late mandarin season when Europe starts the change-over to domestic supply.



*South African fruit at a street stall in Port Louis, Mauritius, where DKI Fruit is one of the dominant fruit importers*

Over the past few weeks there have been signs of a slow recovery in Africa, but, says Eric, this season has been the worst in a series of poor seasons.

Covid-19 lockdown measures hit countries without a formal retail sector particularly hard. Wet markets closed and street sales were prohibited while the buying power of many African consumers, many of whom rely on daily wages, dropped drastically, he says.

There were many difficulties at ports, some shipping lines suspending their service between South Africa and West Africa, and endless problems with cargo stuck at ports, particularly affecting landlocked countries like, among others, Niger and Burkina Faso.

## Comprehensive, year-round fruit supply to Réunion & Mauritius

DKI Fruit also has a strong foothold on the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Réunion, the latter part of French territory (and therefore subject to EU policies).



“We specialise in high-level service, supplying fruit all-year round from South Africa and then, counter-seasonally, from Spain, Italy or Greece. The berry season has started and we send strawberries and figs by airfreight. Later in the season we’ll send cherries.”

*Right: DKI Fruit supplies the full basket of fruit to two Indian Ocean islands*

This year due to problems at the ports they’ve had to truck cargo from Cape Town to Durban, at huge cost, to be shipped from there to the Indian Ocean islands.

They are partners in a distribution company in Mauritius called Real Fresh Fruit (RFF).

## Uncertainty about Golden Delicious availability

The apple trade has similarly operated under trying circumstances, with many of the apple growers allocating favoured varieties in Africa, like Golden Delicious, to alternative markets in the UK and EU (particularly on large counts) to compensate for reduced opportunities in Africa.

As the trade has been picking up its head over the past three weeks, this could cast doubt on the availability of Golden Delicious apples for African clients, Eric notes.



*A truck carrying fruit for DKI Fruit's Mauritian partner, RFF*

In a few months DKI Fruit will start trading in grapes – only red, especially Crimson and Red Globe, as their West African clients don't order white or black grapes. They start off the grape season with Flame.

“We used to ship full containers of grapes to our clients but seeing how expensive a variety like Crimson is, we've offered them the option of making up a basket with apples and pears also in season at that time – or, from time to time, a few pallets of red plums.”

For more information:



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