South African citrus is expected to see growth for 2021 and set another record, according to a new USDA report.

Two citrus categories, in particular, soft citrus and lemons, are expected to see increases in production and exports.

This is attributable to factors such as increased area planted, improved yields, a minimal impact of the pandemic on labor, and a surge in demand due to the assumed benefits of Vitamin C in boosting immunity, the report said.

For soft fruits, production is expected to go up by six percent to 515,000MT. Exports, on the other hand, are forecast to see a nine percent increase rising to 420,000MT.

Amongst export markets, the UK holds the spot of leading destination market as it accounts for 26 percent of the crop's total exports. However, continued growth is expected from the U.S.

While the U.S. accounts for just 6 percent of soft fruit exports, shipments to this country have grown by an average of 15 percent per year over the past four seasons. This trend is expected to continue, helped along by a preference on the U.S. market for easy peelers and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which allows for duty-free imports of citrus.

The shift from oranges to soft citrus exports seen in 2019 is likewise expected to continue, with South African farmers supplying the U.S. market have been re-planting their orchards from oranges to soft citrus in response to market preferences and the higher premium received in the U.S. market.

Production for lemons is likely to be up slightly by just two percent to 670,000MT in 2021 due to a rise in area planted, minimal Covid-19 impact, and the high level of new-plantings coming into full production.

Lemon exports, on the other hand, are expected to grow by 10 percent to 500,000MT as a result of increases in both production, and demand from the Middle Eastern and Asian markets.

Projections in regard to production and exports for oranges and grapefruits only show a slight increase. Orange production is forecast to increase by three percent while grapefruit exports are expected to rise by two percent respectively.