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Citrus export records expected to remain at all-time highs

The industry is estimated to export 158.7 million cartons in 2021.

By Palesa Mofokeng 8 Apr 2021 12:37

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With the citrus season now in full swing, Citrus Growers Association (CGA) is expecting that the industry will break previous records with an estimated 158.7 million cartons in 2021, according to CEO Justin Chadwick.

Chadwick said the projections for 2021 are indicative of a 22% growth in exports in just two years and will add an additional R6.8 billion in foreign exchange earnings from the soft citrus, lemons and Valencia oranges.

Citrus fruit comprise about 55% of South Africa's fruit production and is exported in refrigerated containers (reefers) to over 100 countries mainly in the European Union (EU), Russia, US and Mediterranean countries.

“The demand for our produce overseas is a wonderful testament to the quality of South Africa’s citrus fruit. There is no doubt that citrus growers are investing heavily for the future, with more than R1 billion in grower levies over the next four years going into research and technology to support market access and transformation, while creating an enabling logistics environment to move the fruit.”

The closure of borders during the hard lockdown restricted movement in trading channels, yet South Africa’s citrus industry managed to beat Covid blues by exporting 146 million cartons in 2020.

These levels can be linked to increased demand for vitamin C as citrus fruits such as lemons, oranges and grapefruit were sought-after as many consumers considered them as immune boosters.

But complications at the ports were a concern: a shortage of staff and labour protests affected operations at the Cape Town and Durban ports.

The late arrival of fruit was also reported when Western Cape producers were compelled to transport their produce to the Eastern Cape. Moreover, 22 containers fell into the sea in Port Elizabeth causing a loss in fruit quantity, according to AgriOrbit.

However, in gearing up for the year’s season, Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) GM Sales and New Business Siyabulela Mhlaluka says, “There were extensive pre-season engagements with all terminals to manage readiness with a key focus on people, equipment and process optimisation.”

> **Despite the disruptions, TPT still handled a 16% year-on-year increase in volumes – the highest figure ever recorded.**