

South Africa's citrus markets to see "very little impact" as port gets back to normal - CGA

South Africa's citrus industry body says there will be "very little impact" in its export markets following a few days of disruption as violent unrest erupted in the country.

Parts of the country were recently gripped by more than a week of chaos in which more than 200 people were killed as looters ransacked shopping centers and rioters torched key industrial infrastructure and blocked trade routes.

The unrest hit operations at the key KwaZulu-Natal province port of Durban, temporarily disrupting citrus exports during the middle of the country's season.

However, Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA), said in written comments to Fresh Fruit Portal that the situation had quickly improved over recent days.

Asked to what extent the country's export markets may be affected, Chadwick said: "[There will be] very little impact. The geographic spread of the industry means that all market requirements will be met," he said.

The industry representative also said it's "absolutely astonishing" how quickly Durban port has been able to get back to full operations.

"Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) now working at full capacity – efficiency improved to good levels," he said. "Workers in Durban precinct can now get to work and security has improved – although still need to keep vigilant. The N3 and N2 main arterial highways to Durban are both secure and trucking of fruit to Durban port has resumed.

"Vehicles staged at various places over past ten days have arrived in Durban. Still some backlog as need to clear fruit in the packhouses, and get the containers loaded and market bound. Kwazulu Natal province remains quiet but tense."

He noted that on-farm citrus operations and packing have been "totally unaffected" as the farms and facilities are not in impacted areas.

Durban logistics were disrupted but now gearing back up to normality, he added while the Eastern Cape and Western Cape corridors were not affected at all.

"More time-sensitive fruit from Limpopo province was diverted to Cape Town port. Exporting through Maputo in Mozambique is more complex due to quality and phytosanitary requirements and certification," he said, adding that this is being addressed in a special workgroup.

Over the coming days, Chadwick expects security will be increased in the entire supply chain.

"All roleplayers are working extremely hard to normalize operations and clear backlog," he said.