

South African citrus export forecast cut

South Africa's 2021 citrus export forecast has been reduced following a period of violent unrest in the country, but the latest estimate remains above the 2020 figures as port operations return to normal.

The estimate now stands at 156.2 million cartons across all categories, according to the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA).

The latest figure is down on the original record forecast of 163 million but still up on the current record of 150 million exported last year.

The estimate has been cut for all categories except for soft citrus, which has seen its forecast rise from the original 30.5 million cartons to 30.7 million.

Oranges saw among the most significant declines. Navel exports are expected to be 24.7 million, down from the original 26.3 million estimate, while Valencias are down to 56.4 million from 58 million.

Meanwhile, lemons are down to 26.9 million from 30.2 million, and grapefruit are down to 17.5 million from 18 million.

Citrus industry operations get back to normal

Writing in his weekly newsletter, CGA CEO Justin Chadwick said that the return of port operations to full operational capacity "can only be termed unbelievable".

He said this was thanks to multiple entities involved in the export of South African citrus, including port operator transnet, cold stores, harbor carriers, inspectors of export certification agency PPECB and the Department of Agriculture (DALRRD), container depots and shipping lines.

"Transnet Port Terminals (TPT), Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) and Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) worked around the clock to get their operations up and running," he said.

"The NATCOR line started operating on Sunday morning (July 18th) and is operational (albeit some challenges with locos). TPT is operating at full capacity – and extremely efficiently. Thanks to Portia Derby for her leadership, to management for being available to brief industry (including on Saturday and Sunday) while at the same time ensuring staff safety and operational restoration, and to those operating on the ground who, despite the trauma and impact on family life, have returned to work."

Cold stores around the port returned to 100% operations in a short period – staff safety being the biggest concern, he added.

"Thanks to you for raising awareness of your concerns, giving situational perspective over the weekend and getting operations going 24/7. To the stores just inland of the port – many of whom are still experiencing security concerns - thank you for continuing to operate while the situation normalises around you," he said.

Harbor carriers, a "critical link" in the supply chain, were heavily impacted by arson and vandalism, he said.

"Thank you for gearing up for 24hr operations. We will continue to work with authorities to get appropriate security in place on the road networks," he said.

Regarding PPECB inspectors, he said: "Safety of inspectors is always paramount – but as soon as you could you were back at your posts ensuring that inspections got done. Without inspections, fruit cannot be certified and cannot move. PPECB now working 24/7.

DALRRD inspectors are also back at their posts and working hard to clear the backlog, he said.

On shipping lines, Chadwick said the disruptions have meant that shipping lines have had to relook at their schedules, and adjust as best possible to ensure fruit can be shipped, while also limiting impact on other ports or their rotation around the globe.

"We would like to thank all those who took part in the daily situational analysis and recovery plan meetings – especially those who spent Saturday and Sunday in these meetings. We had 152 people in the meeting on Sunday. The information shared, and plans made were clear and concise."

From Wednesday, July 14 these meetings were paused as the situation was largely normalized, he said.

"We would like to thank growers and packhouses who either stopped packing or slowed down their packing tempo. As a result, the Durban port precinct did not experience much congestion and fruit and containers could flow freely into cold stores, to the terminals and out of the terminals," he said,

"Finally, thank you to those who have sent food and fruit for distribution to those in need. The humanitarian impact of this insurrection will play out in the next weeks and months. If you can donate, please contact sive@citrusacademy.org.za."

 Fresh Fruit Portal.com

