

South African port operator gives citrus growers green light for packing after suspension

South African port operator Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) has now resourced and geared to handle arriving volumes of citrus across its network of terminals, the entity said on Friday, according to local media.

Citrus farmers delivering product for export were temporarily asked to suspend packing until Thursday, [Independent Online](#) reported.

Transnet, which owns and operates 16 terminal operations situated across seven South African Ports, said on Friday daily engagements were being held with the citrus industry to manage the flow of citrus volumes from inland to the port terminals.

“Regular appeals to industry include support, especially from shipping lines who make commercial decisions to bypass some port terminals in favor of others,” said TPT.

This follows hot on the heels of the riots last month. This combined with the global shortage of refrigerated containers, and container depots not working a full 24 hours in alignment with TPT, led to the operator experiencing much congestion in the supply chain, with all cold stores still at capacity.

TPT said the situation was further exacerbated by the cyberattack incident on Transnet's network, forcing it to institute a manual operation for yet another two weeks.

In its weekly letter on Friday, Citrus Growers Association (CGA) chief executive Justin Chadwick thanked growers for responding to the port operators' plea to stop packing.

“The havoc wrought by the insurrection, followed closely by the Transnet cyberattack, meant that South African ports were extremely congested,” said Chadwick.

“As a result, a call was made to growers in the north to consider a temporary hold on harvesting, packing and transporting fruit to Durban from Friday (August 6) to Thursday (August 12).”

The CGA said one did not just turn the “sausage machine” off and there was still considerable fruit to be moved, and hence the trucks carried on arriving last week.

From the figures obtained by Faisal Asmal of trucks en route to Durban, and those already in Durban, growers clearly heeded the call.

Chadwick said this had allowed the cold stores to load out and the port environment to normalize.

Industry and Transnet were holding regular virtual meetings with all stakeholders – over 170 participants attended – to monitor the situation and keep all apprised of the latest situation. A similar call was made to Eastern Cape growers as the ports in that region also faced congestion issues.

This voluntary action from growers illustrates how united the industry is in facing joint challenges – and industry taking the responsibility without needing regulation or enforcement.

According to mid-season review prepared by CGA research economist Portia Magwaza, overall, the 2021 citrus export prediction for southern Africa was now 155 million cartons, some 5 percent off the original estimate. The review said South Africa had now reached the two-thirds mark in terms of citrus packed and passed for export.

The big variable in play now was the port's ability to ship the remaining 53 million cartons.