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South African citrus industry feels the squeeze of load shedding

The impact of South Africa's load shedding is weighing on the citrus industry that must run costly generators to keep fruit fresh as the European Union's (EU) new cold storage regulations loom.

At the export harbors, cold storage operators, especially in the Eastern and Western Cape, are feeling the pressure, the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) has said, according to a report by Business insider.

In places "such as Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, cold storage operators have also invested in generators to ensure the cold stores are not impacted by load shedding," the CGA said.

"However, this obviously comes at a cost, in order to keep these running during prolonged periods of outages, such as those experienced recently under Stage 6," it said.

Over the past week and half, South Africa has experienced one of the worst bouts of rolling blackouts of varying stages. Before this round of load shedding, the country had only undergone Stage 6 once, in 2019.

Although the country's agriculture ministry has not received official notice of the EU's new measures requiring fruit from South Africa to be stored at extreme cold conditions, the persisting power supply issues poses a huge risk to the industry.

Second to the impact on cold storage operations, the power outages have affected farmers' ability to harvest and pack fruit, just as the industry moves into its peak harvest season.

"While some farmers have invested in generators and other back-up power sources in order to remain operational during power outages, this has required a further outlay of capital at a time when growers are facing a number of rising input costs," the CGA said.

All round, the agricultural sector is already contending with fuel price hikes, exorbitant fertilizer costs, and increases in shipping costs.

"It is therefore critical that the current challenges being faced by Eskom, which has impacted its ability to supply power to the country is addressed as soon as possible," the CGA said.

Cold storage operators at the Durban port have not felt much of the pressure yet, as the eThekwini municipality has been exempted from load shedding while the province recovers from the recent floods. Despite plans to keep them exempt, load shedding in the area is due to recommence on 1 August.

To read the full article, please click here.