

Change in fortunes for South African exporters

By [Fred Meintjes](#) | 30 August 2022

South Africa's fresh fruit export industry is contemplating the future after a disappointing 2022 season

The results of the 2022 season have been a huge shock to South African fruit export growers.

With crucial months of the marketing season still ahead for the country's citrus, apple and pear growers, the campaign has collectively been the worst in a decade.

Although growers harvested record crops, for various reasons the South Africans did not see the results back on the farm. The question now is whether the significant growth experienced over the past five years will continue.

In the stonefruit and table grape sectors the past few months have seen a significant degree of soul searching – and they are now only months away from the start of the new season.

The apple and pear industry is much more diversified in terms of markets, but sources in the citrus industry have said they would have to rethink their export strategies due to what happened this season.

Typically, South Africa growers always focus on the future. “When we have a bad season, I usually take a long holiday in the winter,” leading Elgin apple grower Josias Beukes used to say. “When it is a good season, I stay at home and watch the money rolling in.”

For table grape growers it is now very much a case of facing the future head on. AJ Griesel, CEO of the SA Table Grape Industry (SATI), said: “We have had our postmortems and it has been a tough season in which some growers battled. We are now ready to move ahead.

“We are committed to maintaining our position a leading supplier of the best quality table grapes in the world,” he added.

In 2022 stonefruit growers harvested record plum and nectarine crops, but logistical problems due to shortages of containers, wind and other delays in Cape Town, and shipping vessels arriving

EUROFRUIT tion ports and sometimes when the fruit was already near the end of its shelf-life, dominated the season.

The off-season was therefore a difficult time for the stonefruit industry and resulted in a total rethink of strategies.

A comprehensive recovery plan has been designed and its successful implementation will very much dictate the success of the industry in future.

It is likely that table grape growers, having accepted that they will have to deal with a slower supply chain which will take longer to deliver their fruit to overseas customers, will focus much more on the quality of the grapes they harvest and pack.

This may mean that they limit the number of bunches on the vines and pack less fruit.

Citrus growers ran smack bang into the disruption of the war between Russia and Ukraine, which affected around 10 per cent of historical citrus sales.

Then the European Union threw them a curve ball in what South African sources called 'malicious and clear protectionist' actions by changing access regulations for South African oranges mid-season and with very little warning.

For both apples, pears and citrus from South Africa the season is far from over, but there are already intense discussions around the effect of this season's events on the future. Against this background only time will tell whether the growth of recent years will be maintained.