

Eastern Cape plant ramps up citrus export capacity

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Pierneef Smit of Cheetah Pack. Source: Supplied

A new fruit packing plant in the Sundays River Valley will boost South Africa's already-strong citrus export volumes to China, a Dutch perishables portal has reported.

The 3 000 sqm Cheetah Pack facility in Addo on the outskirts of Gqberha (Port Elizabeth), boasts state-of-the-art packing-line technology from Ganzhou-based fruit sorting and grading machine manufacturer, Reemoon.

In real terms this *quid pro quo* investor arrangement, using Chinese tech to prepare fruit for China, enables Cheetah to pack 120-150 bins of soft citrus on a daily basis.

In addition, the Eastern Cape facility can manage 200 to 220 bins of lemons and 300 to 350 bins of oranges in a day.

Pierneef Smit, one of Cheetah's directors, said the idea behind the venture had originated through necessity at a time when South African fruit exports started curving up.

"We started discussing the possibility of our own pack house six years ago, as a means to procure enough fruit for the Chinese market but also to alleviate the packing

constraints in the Valley with the recent strong growth in citrus volumes.”

The lion’s share of Cheetah’s fruit-packing capacity will actually go towards Berda Agricultural Consulting, headquartered in Tzaneen in Limpopo Province.

However, other citrus growers will not be excluded from using the facility.

Neville Smith, chief operating officer for Cheetah, said: “We’re here not only for big producers but also for smaller producers, and we will have an open-door policy.”

The pack house is but a first phase of establishing an all-encompassing fruit export complex in the Kirkwood area.

Subsequent phases are said to include de-greening and research facilities, the latter being planned in partnership with Huida Lemons in Chongqing, north-west of Ganzhou.

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