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South Africa's citrus exports expected to take strain in 2023

13TH MARCH 2023 BY: MARLENY ARNOLDI - CREAMER MEDIA ONLINE WRITER



Following what has been an extremely tough year for citrus growers, the Citrus

Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) predicts another year of export declines may be in store, ahead of the 2023 export season starting in April.

The 2022 season saw 5.7-million fewer cartons exported than what was initially predicted at the start of the season, totalling 164-million cartons.

As a result, only one in five growers made a positive return in the 2022 season, owing to a surge in farming input prices and transport costs, as well as astronomical shipping price hikes.

The cost of getting fruit to market has become commercially unviable for many growers, the association asserts, adding that the introduction of the unjustified new False Coddling Moth regulations passed by the European Union mid-season did not help either.

As many of these challenges are expected to persist in 2023, including erratic electricity supply and public infrastructure decay, the CGA says the citrus industry will show only moderate growth or even a contraction in 2023, compared with 2022.

The current prediction is that 37-million cartons of 15 kg each of lemons will be exported to key markets, which is an increase of 2.6-million cartons compared with 2022.

CGA attributes the increase in lemon exports to many younger trees coming into production across a number of regions, including the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

However, some downside risks to this estimate include recent heavy rains in the northern parts of the country, as well as hail in the Eastern Cape, which could potentially decrease the overall volumes exported, as the impact of these weather events materialise.

The association further predicts that 25-million cartons of navels will be exported – a 2.5-million decrease compared with 2022. The CGA says farms in some regions have not been exporting their fruit, owing to farmers' inability to irrigate crops during loadshedding and recent hailstorms in the Western Cape.

Further, about 54-million cartons of Valencia's will be exported in this 2022/23 season, which will be 700 000 cartons higher than exported in the 2021/22 season. The CGA says good weather

conditions in a number of regions have resulted in higher production levels.

However, feedback from some markets has revealed a decrease in the consumption levels of this citrus in some countries, which could impact the final amounts shipped.

The association predicts that 12-million cartons, at 17 kg each, of grapefruit will be exported in the season, which is a decrease of 2.1-million cartons compared with 2022, owing to many regions not planning to pack class two and processed grapefruit for export this year.

The association states that the industry and government, as well as value chain stakeholders, need to work together to overcome challenges, particularly to retain as many market access opportunities as possible.

Key markets that offer expanded access potential in the coming season include the US, India, Vietnam, Thailand and Korea.

The industry will continue to achieve only moderate growth, or face declines, as long as the R30-billion industry remains unsupported, the CGA states. 🇷🇺

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