



# Less South African citrus in Saudi Arabia this season

In normal times, a large share of the citrus fruit consumed in Saudi Arabia comes from South Africa. However, this season, with the supply shortages that have marked the season in South Africa, Saudi importers have had to adapt.

Kashif Shahzad, supply chain manager at Global Star, a Saudi fresh produce importer, told FreshPlaza: "Under normal conditions, around 60-70% of our citrus fruits comes from South Africa. We import oranges, grapefruit, lemons, and mandarins. We definitely have a preference for South African citrus due to the excellent quality of the fruit grown there. South Africa benefits from a favorable climate and rich agricultural practices that result in produce of consistent quality".



This season, weather conditions in South Africa had an impact on volumes. "South African citrus did not perform well in Saudi Arabia this season, and we saw a drop in volumes compared with the previous season. At our level, at Global

Star, this drop is about 18% and mainly concerns oranges. Despite the drop in volumes, the quality of South African citrus this year remained commendable. The fruit retained its excellent taste, juiciness, and vibrant color, meeting our customers' expectations. The size of the citrus fruit has varied, but still was generally within an acceptable range".

In addition to the drop in production, the Saudi market was penalized by the commercial choices made by South African exporters. "They unfortunately turned to Europe to take advantage of higher profitability and strong demand. This shift also contributed to the reduction in volumes destined for Saudi Arabia", regrets Kashif.



In these circumstances, it was no easy task for Saudi importers to make up for the deficit in the supply. "None of the other regions were able to meet the market's needs, due to the strong demand for volumes in the Middle East. We opened the doors to citrus imports from other regions, such as Spain and Egypt, but the volumes were not sufficient. Moreover, during the citrus season in South Africa, no other region has a proper citrus season. Apart from the lack of volumes in Egypt and Spain, quality was good, as these countries are also known for producing high-quality citrus fruit, enabling us to continue to provide our customers with adequate supplies.

Lack of volumes was the sole challenge of the season, concludes Kashif. "We do business with South African exporters in favorable conditions. Transit time, handling, and shipping run smoothly, thanks to the efficient coordination with our counterparts in South Africa and the various stakeholders involved in the citrus trade."

Kashif Shahzad

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