



Million carton milestone for Midknights after 25 years of United States exports

Homage to a stalwart South African orange



The South African midseason orange variety Midnight fits the celebrated American fall season perfectly with its bright dark orange colours, says Reinier Meyer of Kardouw Farms, an importer of South African citrus based in Philadelphia.

The Midnight's sweet and juicy characteristics make it the ideal forerunner to the California navel season, but over the 25 years in which it has been exported to the United States, it has not received the attention it deserves, he believes.

"The Midnight orange never gets a special mention or focus. It's not a new orange and it's not part of any special club. It never gets centre stage as something special yet makes up a large portion of the South African citrus crop and Midknights are grown in every single production region in South Africa, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Mozambique."

In fact, almost 40% of Southern Africa's orange orchards are planted with Midnights. The variety emerged around a century ago on the farm of Mr AP Knight farming between Kirkwood and Addo: the orange was much earlier than the old seeded oranges, hence the appellation referring to midseason.

Kardouw Farms intend the seasonal packaging it has designed for Midnight oranges as an ode to Midnights, he says, a recognition of the tremendous contribution this variety has made to the South African citrus industry.

“Dressing the Midnight oranges in a special bag and giving it a bit of character and focus is done purely to give it the recognition it deserves for the great history, characteristics and pleasure it has given many consumers over the years as a premium seedless orange.”



Import season ends on a high note

Reinier says the US citrus market was a tad slow at the beginning – the heavy rains of June over the Western Cape had a dampening effect on quality early in the season, but hereafter “everything just clicked”, he remarks, “and we expect that the US campaign is going to end on a strong note.”

The last vessel for the season is being loaded, due to arrive towards the end of October.

The plentiful rain has meant that Midnights tested harvest-ready earlier than usual, which has extended the picking window – a good thing, too, as Californian citrus growers have indicated their navel crop will come in later than usual.

"Therefore there was a longer window to export Midnight oranges to the United States by starting earlier."

Reinier remarks that a milestone was reached this year. "For the first time ever, more than a million cartons of Midknights were sent to the USA."



North American market allows for brand creativity

He continues: "The North American market in terms of fresh citrus is a very diverse market that allows the opportunity to participate on various tiers with many different products. It is also a market that allows creativity, that can be bold and innovative and this is also embraced by the trade in a consistent progressive manner."

Kardouw Farms, as part of Summer Citrus, imports Midknights from late September until mid November. It is vertically integrated with its Farms and Suppliers at source to fulfil in customers' needs and requirements.

"In future Kardouw Farms will have other citrus items perfectly fitting within the fall period. That will make for a very exciting range."



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