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Citrus growers optimistic for a more fruitful season

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Source: CNN

South Africa's citrus industry is hoping for a more positive season after last year was a "disaster," Justin Chadwick of the Citrus Growers Association has said.

According to the CGA's CEO, last year the freight rate was double the norm, which accounts for 30-40% of growers' costs.

"So it was a big hit on returns.

"The European Union also changed the regulation on False Codling Moth after we had fruit on the water, which made it impossible for growers to comply.

"It meant that exporters paid an additional R300 million to have fruit cleared at EU borders.

"The prices at market were okay but certainly not enough to cover all these extra costs.

"In addition, the ports continue to operate below optimum efficiency."

Chadwick said that these new regulations brought in by the European Union have no scientific basis.

Therefore, the CGA is imploring the EU to look at this again as there has not been one interception since the interim measures were introduced in 2022.

In order to meet the requirements, an investment of R1.4 billion would need to be made – which is not possible as the season starts in a few weeks.

The impact could mean that 20% fewer oranges are exported to the EU in 2023.

"The Spanish should not be threatened by South African citrus.

"We are not even in the market at the same time as them.

"South African imports ensure there is citrus on the shelves all year round, which is good for everyone."

Adding to challenges at home is load shedding – a disaster for growers, *Fresh Plaza* reports.

Everything from irrigation to packing is affected by it.

"Growers need electricity for irrigation. There is no alternative. They also rely on it for packing and need to have a consistent cold chain.

"People are buying generators and investing in solar power systems as they can't afford to not have a consistent power supply.

"However, growers have no control of what happens to the fruit when it enters the cold chain and gets delivered to warehouses and ports."

Despite all the difficulties that growers have to endure, South African citrus exports remain robust, maintaining the country's position as the globe's 2nd biggest exporter.

Citrus exports to China are increasing every year. Russia is also a good market for South African citrus, but freight there remains very high. India has great potential, and there is hope for access to other markets such as Japan and Vietnam.

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