

Citrus production grows in Southern Hemisphere

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Source: Louise Brodie

Citrus crops in the Southern Hemisphere are continuing to grow, with oranges still leading export volumes with estimates of 1.57 million tonnes forecast for the region during the 2023 season.

This was the forecast Ensleme Cleron, a representative of CIRAD, the French agricultural research and cooperation organisation, shared during his presentation on the present status of the citrus industry, at the World Citrus Organisation's Annual General Meeting.

Citrus Growers Association CEO, Justin Chadwick, reporting back on the meeting in his weekly newsletter, said Cleron had made specific reference to Southern Hemisphere estimates.

According to CIRAD's research, hectares of citrus have grown in the Southern Hemisphere since 2013.

Orange hectares experienced modest growth - from 132 000 Ha to 136 000 Ha - and there has been substantial growth in mandarin hectares - from 67 000 Ha to 88 000 Ha -

with similar figures for lemon hectares that rose from 65 000 Ha to 87 000 Ha. However, grapefruit hectares bucked the trend, dropping from 16 000 Ha to 14 000 Ha.

CIRAD indicated that oranges still led Southern Hemisphere citrus export estimates, with 1.57m tonnes, a 2% increase compared to 2022 and 1% more than the five-year average. Mandarins are at almost 1m cartons, a 3 % increase over 2022 and a 16% increase on the five-year average.

Lemons are at 928 000 tons, 10% less than in 2022 and at five-year average levels, while grapefruit, at 220 000 tons, dropped 13% compared to 2022 and are 13% off the long-term average.

According to CIRAD's research, the transition from Northern Hemisphere to Southern Hemisphere supply should be seamless as there is an early end to the Northern Hemisphere season, with one of the smallest crops in the Mediterranean region for the last decade.

Spanish late oranges are 27% below the four-year average, while Spanish verna lemons are down 32% against the average. There have also been significant increases in citrus import prices of 20-38%, with lemons being the best-performing fruit.

However, there would be competition for imported Southern Hemisphere citrus in Europe from other fruits (stone fruit, bananas) that were expected to be heavier in volume than the last two seasons, CIRAD's research noted.

Chadwick said the 2023 estimates for packed and shipped varieties had been difficult.

"The 2023 estimation process has been extremely difficult given the uncertainty around global factors and the experiences of 2022. After much deliberation, the Mandarin Focus Group has settled on an estimate of 34.1m cartons – a 7% increase from last season," Chadwick said.

He added that the satsuma season was almost complete, with 1 413m cartons (91%) of the 1 557m carton estimate already packed for export.

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