

South Africa's orange and lemon export figures adjusted downward

The Lemon Focus Group of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has adjusted South Africa's lemon export figures downward. The Orange Focus Group of the CGA also reviewed the export estimates on oranges for the 2024 season with a further downward adjustment made to the latest projected export figures for Navels, while the category for Valencia oranges received its biggest projection cut of the season, mostly driven by recently reported extreme weather events in key growing regions. Although the lemon season is drawing to a close, and some areas have finished packing, feedback from the remaining harvesting areas has necessitated a further downward adjustment of the overall export estimate.



At the start of the lemon season, the export of 37.9 million 15kg cartons of lemons was projected. This has been reduced during meetings held throughout the season. This week's adjustment brings the total estimate for 2024 exports of

lemons to 33.9 million cartons. Last year, Southern Africa exported 35.6 million cartons.

Adjustments this week by the Sundays River Valley (down almost 1 million cartons) and the Western Cape (Citrusdal down 100 000 cartons) were the most significant. Strong winds in the Sundays River Valley and flooding in Citrusdal have had an impact on these figures.

The overall lemon estimate follows a pattern that has become clear as the citrus season progressed: due to drier weather causing fruit sizes to be somewhat smaller, good local juicing prices, as well as recent severe weather events, less 15kg cartons of citrus will be exported than expected.

Leroux Venter, Chairman of the Lemon Focus Group, contextualised the adjustment: "There is a clear swing in the figures. It has been a very unusual season. While there was an initial concern that there might be an oversupply of lemons, this is definitely not the case anymore. Supply will be relatively stable and the demand, especially in Europe, looks good."

Oranges

The projected number of 15kg cartons of Navel oranges expected to be exported is now 21 million, continuing the downward trajectory that was started in May when the season opening estimate of 25.7 million was reduced to 22 million. This latest review brings the total reduction for the season to a significant 19%. Currently, late Navels are being packed and shipped as the Navel season draws to a close.

For Valencia oranges, key growing regions in Limpopo and Mpumalanga are well under way with their season, while growers in the Eastern- and Western Cape will only start to pack their first Valencia volumes in earnest in the coming weeks. The latest projected volume of 15kg cartons of Valencias expected to be exported by Southern African growers is now 51,6 million, down from May's forecast of 56 million, and April's season opening estimate of 58 million. This is a 11% reduction from the first estimate. The largest downward adjustments reflected in the latest review come out of Letsitele, Hoedspruit and the Senwes (Marble Hall and Groblersdal) areas, where the season's production trends have already revealed itself. Marble Hall and Groblersdal were also hard hit by recent frost damage, further reducing production forecasts.

"Inclement weather over the past two weeks has meant further reduction in predicted volumes," said Stiaan Engelbrecht, Chairman of the Orange Focus Group. "The freezing cold in the Senwes region has meant that the Navel estimate in that region has been reduced by 600 000 cartons and the Valencia volumes by

one million cartons. The Western Cape (Citrusdal) has been impacted by recent flooding and storms, while the Eastern Cape has been impacted by high winds," Engelbrecht continued. Storms and winds cause fruit to drop from trees, while frost damage also impacts production.

"It is now clear that there will not be an oversupply of oranges this season. We are looking at a balanced market," said Jan-Louis Pretorius, Vice Chairman of the CGA and a citrus grower in Limpopo.

"These adjusted figures tell the story of a unique season. Firstly, drier and warmer conditions caused fruit sizes to be somewhat smaller. Secondly, a very good local juicing price enticed growers to move more oranges to processing. Thirdly, the bad weather of the past two and a half weeks caused challenges. The last time the industry was looking at similar orange figures was during the 2017 season, especially remembered for the Western Cape drought," Pretorius explained.

Last year South Africa packed 24.8 million 15kg cartons of Navels and 52.1 million 15kg cartons of Valencias for export to foreign markets.

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