

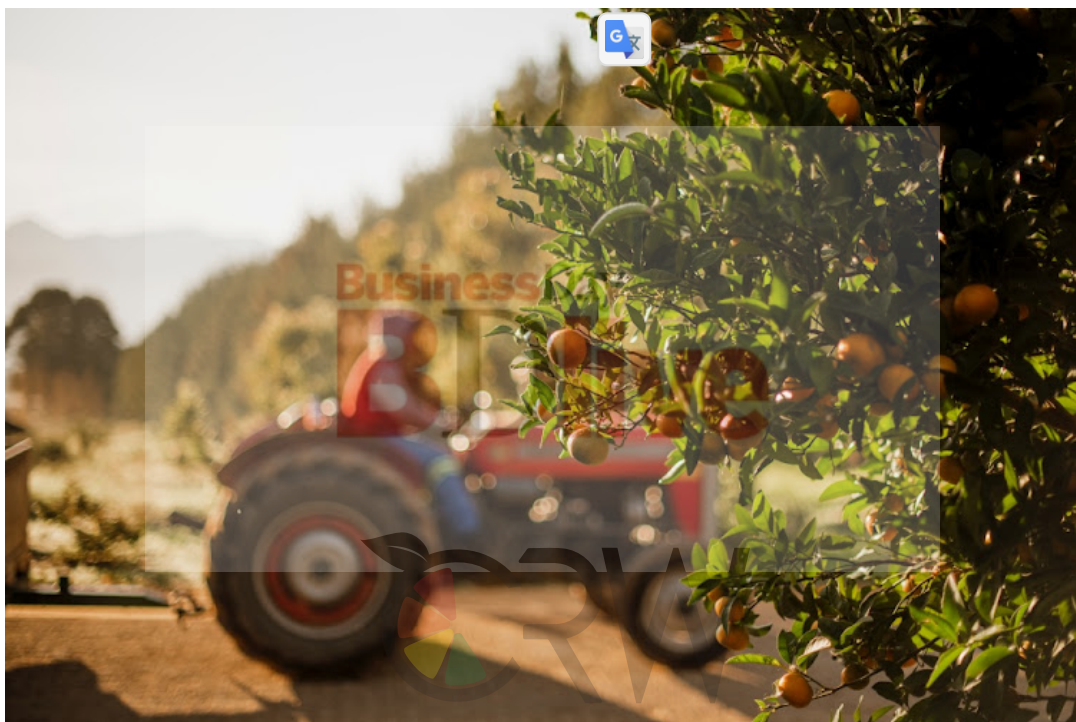
## ■ ECONOMY

## Botswana's ban on SA imports harms relations, Agbiz warns

Business chamber calls for an urgent solution that is amicable but 'legally sufficient'

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by NOMPILO GOBA



Picture: SUPPLIED

The Agricultural Business Chamber of SA (Agbiz) has decried Botswana's import bans on SA fruits and vegetables, arguing that the restrictions are not only unsustainable but also detrimental to political and economic relations between the two countries.

"As the two parties are both members of a customs union, a ban on trade introduces instability as it undermines the concept of borderless trade in a customs union — that is, no internal tariff or nontariff barriers between members.

"It is also a commercial shock to existing exports and importers of citrus. As the two sides cannot escape each other, a solution must be found," said Wolfe Logan Braude, manager of Agbiz Fruit at Agbiz.

Botswana's temporary ban on orange imports, effective from June 17 to August 31, is part of a broader strategy to boost its local agriculture and achieve food self-sufficiency. The measures include extended restrictions on various fresh produce imports until 2025.

SA citrus exports to Botswana are thus facing disruption, despite SA being the second-largest citrus exporter globally, with projections of more than 167-million 15kg cartons this year.

"The price of oranges in Botswana may fluctuate in the short term due to the ban, but in the medium term should stabilise as production is increasing to meet local demand. The risk of market inefficiencies is there, but not for long, as local production will be sufficient for local demand. Botswana expects to export 70% of its citrus production," Braude said.

### **Price fluctuations**

Botswana's strategy includes increasing local production to meet domestic demand and eventually becoming a reliable exporter, and the Citrus Growers Association of Southern African (CGA) supports this effort.

However, Braude emphasised that the bans could trigger price fluctuations and supply shortages, which would affect consumers and producers.

"It is likely that [Botswana] will become a reliable exporter, as it has the support of the CGA, which it joined in 2022. This has allowed the local citrus growers increased access to global markets and assisted them in optimising the cost-effective production of high-quality fruit from the region and making industry resources available to them, including the latest research from Citrus Research International, a division of CGA."

The ban affects less than 0.5% of SA's citrus exports but has a more significant impact on vegetable trade, with Botswana being a key market.

Braude said the bans not only harmed commercial interests but also contravened the Southern African Customs Union (Sacu) agreement and World Trade Organisation agreements.

He said the bans had frustrated SA suppliers for years, adding that they weakened the customs union and created market inefficiencies.

“An amicable but legally sufficient solution is required urgently. It can be noted that both countries negotiate under the Sacu umbrella when they sign trade agreements, and thus must be on the same page as trade partners,” he said. “Farming requires a robust ecosystem of support industries and infrastructure. Arbitrary controls can disrupt this balance.”

Agbiz advocates for a political and economic solution that respects the legal frameworks of the customs union and addresses the needs of both countries’ agricultural sectors.

“Collaborative, evidence-based programmes between SA and Botswana could help develop sustainable fruit and vegetable production in Botswana,” Braude said, calling for a co-operative approach to resolve the issue.

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#### BOTSWANA FUELS TRADE WAR WITH SA

SA's neighbour has imposed a temporary ban on its exports of oranges

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