

Thailand offers opportunities for South African citrus

By [Fred Meintjes](#) | 24 October 2024

The return of South African apples and pears to Thailand will inspire other fruit sectors to increase activity in the country

With South African avocados celebrating new market access in the East, and the country's apples and pears soon returning to Thailand after a long absence, citrus sources have said that they also see potential opportunities in Thailand – provided certain issues can be resolved.

Even in the case of avocados, where much publicity has been given to the arrival of the first containers in Japan, China and India, it will be some time before other issues inhibiting enhanced trade can be resolved.

In the case of apples and pears it will not be realistic to expect much activity until next year.

The same applies to avocados, where exporters have said they would rather move forward with caution.

Avocado, apple and pear exporters have noted that high trade tariffs are presenting real problems in some countries. This is particularly the case for avocados in India, apples and pears in India and citrus in Thailand.

"The problem of high tariffs applies all over the region and should be addressed on a government to government level," said one exporter.

Justin Chadwick, CEO of the South African Citrus Growers' Association, said that so far this season the country had supplied mainly oranges to Thailand, but that red grapefruit and mandarins could be added in future.

"High import tariffs are a real problem, but we will definitely see increased exports in future," he outlined.

Hopes for an expansion of the South African table grape and citrus portfolios in Japan, and possible entry for the country's blueberries, were dashed during this month's trade visit to Japan.

“The main focus of work to be done on table grapes and citrus – and blueberries will not be on the agenda soon,” said Brent Walsh, CEO of Berries ZA. “However, we had a chance to introduce ourselves and we will be playing a longer-term game there.”

Until then, one must expect that the UK and Europe will receive the lion share of South African berry exports.

So far this year exports of South African blueberries to the UK increased by nearly 58 per cent, while exports to Europe have declined by 15 per cent.

The new export season is now moving towards its peak with the bulk of shipments to depart from Cape Town by the end of November.

When South Africa returns with its apples and pears to Thailand, it will do so with an entirely different offering than in the past.

The leading apple export category, Gala, has been strengthened by full red types such as Flash Gala and Bingo, while the country has also seen a big focus on the eating quality of its products.

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