

Citrus export figures dip slightly

Yesterday - by Staff reporter



Source: Fresh Produce MEA

Southern African citrus growers packed 164.5 million 15kg cartons for delivery to global markets in the 2024 export season, representing a marginal decline in volumes compared with last year.

This is according to the latest statistics released by the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) on Thursday.

“While this is 600 000 cartons less than last year, the slight decline is still a strong performance for the sector, given the truly uniquely demanding circumstances growers faced,” said Justin Chadwick, CGA CEO.

A number of unforeseen factors forced the CGA to adjust its export estimates regularly during the year. The initial estimate for total exports was 181.7 million 15kg cartons. The final figure fell 9% short of this.

One of the most prominent factors affecting export volumes was the high price offered for oranges destined for local processing.

CGA Business Intelligence and Data Manager, Precious Kunota, said sources in the juice industry had reported a significant increase of between 60% to 80% in volumes of

oranges processed at their facilities, compared with the 2023 season.

“It’s estimated that about six million 15kg cartons of oranges – that is 7% – destined for exports, were diverted to juice plants,” Kunota said.

Another factor was the abnormally hot and dry conditions during the mid to late summer period, which led to smaller fruit sizes. This meant that approximately 4% more fruit was required to fill the same carton than in the previous year.

“No less than three severe weather events also had an impact on exports. Freezing temperatures in Limpopo, floods in the Western Cape (Citrusdal), and strong winds that caused fruit to drop in the Eastern Cape resulted in a reduction of fruit packed for global markets,” said Chadwick.

He said although exports had declined slightly, the amount of citrus being produced in South Africa continued to increase.

“It is estimated that in total 10.1 million cartons were diverted to local juicing and lost to weather events. Considering this, the CGA is confident that, if all role-players come together, our long-term growth target of exporting 260 million cartons and creating 100 000 jobs by 2032 is achievable,” Chadwick said.

The final packed figures for 2024 are as follows:

- 14.3 million cartons (15kg equivalent) of grapefruit were packed for export. This is 300 000 less than in the 2023 season and a 14% shortfall from the initial estimates made in April 2024.
- 41.6 million cartons of mandarins were packed, representing a 3.6 million increase since the previous season. However, this was 3% less than the initial estimate.
- Lemons packed declined to 34.7 million cartons down 9% from the estimate and 1.1 million cartons less than 2023.
- Navel oranges packed rose by 400 000 cartons to 25.1 million cartons, although this was a 2% decrease from the original estimate.
- A total of 48.7 million cartons of Valencia oranges were packed, which was 4.7 million less than last year and 16% below initial estimates.

Chadwick said port efficiency had remained a serious concern for the citrus industry during the past season.

“The lower-than-expected citrus export volumes reduced peak volumes at ports dramatically, which eased pressure on the container terminals. However, all indications are that this is just a temporary reprieve in pressure on our underperforming ports and will not last.”

He said volumes would increase over the next few seasons and if port efficiency was not improved “citrus exports and the wider economy will suffer greatly”.

CGA’s Logistics Development Manager Mitchell Brooke said the association was of “the strong opinion” that more public-private partnerships were needed urgently.

“Although the partnership between Transnet and International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI) on Durban Pier 2 has been delayed because of legal matters, there must be a renewed urgency to improve container terminals and unlock the economic potential of our ports,” said Brooke.

Chadwick added that the European Union's “unscientific and unnecessarily restrictive” trade measures on Citrus Black Spot (CBS) and False Coddling Moth (FCM) continued to have a dampening effect on exports.

“These measures still represent an entire opportunity cost for local growers of R3.7 billion. South Africa's historic cases against these measures at the World Trade Organization are making progress and are set to enter the next phase in the dispute process in mid-December,” he said.

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