

Uzair Essack - Riyp

"South African citrus season will be dependant on the situation in the Middle East"

The 2023 South African citrus season saw its last exports in September last year and growers and exporters are already looking towards this year's season.

"From a grower's perspective it was tough, they had to deal with load shedding which meant more expenditure on diesel while packing and for the cold stores, they also had to deal with the port situation where there were, and still are major delays," explains Uzair Essack from Riyp which sources and exports fruit from all around Africa.



South African citrus growers and exporters also had to adhere to the cold treatment regulations to Europe, before the citrus could be loaded at ambient temperature, but now it must all be precooled, which adds another expense.

“On the positive side the markets were good, our growers had 30% less production and arrived on an empty European market as Egyptian volumes were also down. Selling was easy in the 40 markets which we supply. This helped the growers get better returns. We try to get the best returns for our growers, if we don't we will have no fruit to export the following year. Due to the shortage of fruit we found that the various markets were willing to take sizes that they would not normally consider.”



Riyp sources citrus from all regions of South Africa and Uzair said they are also seeing a big increase in investment in other African countries such as Zimbabwe and Botswana for fruit production.

“We are also seeing fruit increasingly being shipped out of ports other than Cape Town to reduce the delays. The markets are also changing, traditionally South Africa shipped almost all the citrus to Europe, we are now diversifying. The US is a growing market, with less issues than the EU. India has seen a massive increase in imports from South Africa, and not just for citrus, we exported our first mangoes to India this week!”

African markets such as Senegal are growing as are Mauritius and the Maldives. The Middle and Far East markets have also grown and give good returns. Exporting directly to the UK is also advantageous as they no longer have the same phyto requirements as Europe.



Looking forward to this year's season Uzair said he is hearing that South Africa won't be short on citrus, unless there is some significant climatic event.

"The war in the Middle East will have a huge influence, as Egyptian exporters are saying that they will send more to Europe instead of taking the longer, more expensive route to Asia around the Cape of Good Hope. This will mean much less fruit in the Eastern markets and much more still in Europe when the South African season starts. This may all change depending on what happens in the coming months, but the South African citrus season will be dependant on the situation in the Middle East."

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