

Eddy Kreukniet, Exsa Europe:

"European market has room for quality South African oranges"

The first shipments of new South African citrus have begun. Eddy Kreukniet of Exsa Europe and Niek van Rijsbergen visited those cultivation areas last week. "There have been no issues with wind, rain, or storms, so for now, this season's runway looks clear," says Eddy.



Stijn, Eddy, and Floor Kreukniet

"There are the usual concerns. You can never be sure what percentage of fruit will be rejected due to black spot, so that remains a tense factor. There are still significant logistical uncertainties; Cape Town has not likely resolved all its problems. Conventional ships from Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, thus, remain a welcome addition, as does the extra container line from Port Elizabeth. Fortunately, citrus is less sensitive than grapes or plums, but logistics unfortunately stay unpredictable."

"A reasonably good grapefruit crop is expected in South Africa, with an emphasis on the smaller sizes (45-55). Fortunately, local juice prices are strong. I hope South African suppliers have the sense to direct the smaller sizes and Class II to the juice industry and send the good sizes to Europe. If that happens, the market should be stable," Eddy explains.

Longer Spanish season

"With lemons, we have a situation where Spain continues longer with a good harvest of Verna lemons. That means some customers will switch to South African lemons somewhat later. But Vernas aren't the prettiest lemons, so high-end clients will probably quickly switch to South African lemons, which are juicier, too."

"The mandarins also look good, with a slight increase expected, especially in the late varieties. The market has room for more volumes and promotions. Early varieties, like Satsuma, Clementine, and Nova, are available, though not in overly large volumes. How these sales start depends partly on other producing countries like Peru and Europe's positions," Eddy points out.

Last but not least, the Navels are also starting to ripen in South Africa. "We're aware of the oversaturated market situation due to the many Egyptian oranges dumped in Europe because of overproduction and Red Sea issues, but those are all Valencias. Europe should have room for good oranges."

High juice prices

"Local juice prices are good for oranges, too; they're perhaps the highest ever. Hopefully, this will prevent the market from being overloaded early on. The first Valencias look good and are a bit smaller in the early production areas. For the mid and late varieties, it remains to be seen. There are many elements that can influence the orange market."

"I'm generally not negative about the orange season. Egypt will be off the market by July, and Morocco isn't keen on sending a lot of fruit to Europe unless it's for a lot of money. There's good demand in Canada and the US. So, I expect a relatively normal transition to South Africa, although last year's extremely high prices that even topped €20 are unlikely. However, it certainly won't be a cheap season," concludes Eddy.



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