

South Africa's 2024 citrus season started slowly, maintains good spread between markets

The South African 2024 citrus harvest started slowly according to Erik van Zyl, export manager at Cape Five Export, "The packing dates started later in the North compared to last year. In the Western Cape the packing dates are in line. Internal quality looks good."



He says they have a good spread of South African citrus to different markets. "We have a good spread between markets. In Europe, we are careful not to put too much early fruit in there, because there's a lot of Egyptian and EU fruit that remains. Our focus is on the Middle-East, Far East and China. We started well on lemons, then the market came under pressure. Over the last two weeks, we have seen more demand from the Middle East for lemons. We even started to get demand in Europe, especially for the Star Ruby grapefruit that does not compete with other origins," explains Van Zyl.



Cape Five also exports stone fruit and blueberries from South Africa. Van Zyl says while they are spreading exports between different markets, they are careful not to overwhelm the Chinese market. "In the past two weeks, big shipments were sent to China. Everyone is very careful of what happened there two to three years ago, to not over supply that market, we are careful to work with fixed prices, to avoid an over-supply."

Van Zyl says Navels are also in good demand in other markets. "The new season product is seeing good demand. It is limited to Europe. "The South African citrus season looks like it is a little later. The prospects are good, we don't find price pressure, except for the first wave of lemons. The Eastern Cape did not kick in yet with their bigger volumes. We also started shipping to the U.S. market."



Everyone is keeping a close eye on the South African ports, which looks to have a better start this year. Last year, Cape Five opted to send citrus via the port in Maputo to avoid costly delays. "At this stage, we don't find pressure in the ports. But, remember we're still in the early part of the season, the big pressure is still coming with Valencia's. We are still looking at the Maputo option, we have to look at alternatives. Durban can come under pressure, while Cape Town plays a lower role in citrus exports," concludes Van Zyl.

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