

Soft citrus shift in the Cape to avoid clash with late mandarins

Winter rain pleases all Cape farmers – although citrus farmers perhaps rejoice less loudly than grain and deciduous fruit farmers, who had been worried by an exceptionally warm and dry May. Fruit colouring on citrus has been slowed by the warm temperatures.

Last week's heavy rains have subsided and the citrus harvest can commence, but since fruit first goes into degreening rooms, packhouses will have a breather this week before they recommence with all hands on deck, packing citrus 24 hours a day.

Sonlia packhouse in Wellington is among them: here various categories of fruit are packed: from C count plums with a diameter of 40mm to Count 5 pomegranates with 115mm diameter, on two pack lines. Sonlia packed 3,207 pallets of export pomegranates this year and although volumes were less than last year, Sonlia Marketing's export volumes (under the Colors brand) more than doubled.





Colors, Sonlia's soft citrus, stone fruit and pomegranate export brand

Growers pleased with late mandarin crop

They give technical support staff a workout running this array of fruit over the line, remarks Sonlia's CEO JC Muller, but in this way, they fully capitalize on the costs of running a packhouse. And there's no shortage of fruit to pack: they had to push to finish up with the pomegranates this year to make way for the increasing amounts of early clementines.

"On soft citrus we've recently experienced a whole shift: traditionally May and June brought high volumes but recently a number of the producers who pack with us, sawed off their clemenules. The early Tangos from the north of South Africa clash with their clemenules," he says.

When faced with the choice, overseas buyers invariably choose late mandarins, and growers are opting to plant earlier clementines like Octubrina. "In our grouping, a fair amount of Octubrinas have been planted to replace clemenules."

Their own late mandarins will be cropped in two or three weeks. "The growers all indicate there's a nice late mandarin crop hanging," Muller says. "We're looking



This value pack's appeal to children makes it a top seller among their local clients

Lighter lemon crop

"The lemon season is definitely lighter. According to Citrus Growers' Association figures, total exports are 14% lower than last year at this point, and it chimes with what we're also seeing," Muller adds, noting that counts are slightly smaller. They will be packing seedless lemons for the first time this year.

Unlike the price for processing oranges, however, the lemon juice price is truly weak: R150 (7.37 euros) a tonne and there's not much space on the market for marginal counts.

Sonlia will pack the citrus of fifteen growers until September and one month later, stone fruit restart. It could be early: some of the early nectarines are already budding, three to five days earlier than last year, again as a result of this uncharacteristically warm month of May.

At least, he remarks, the current cold and snow in the Western Cape will induce

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