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Orange export expectations drop lower as severe weather threatens volumes

24TH JULY 2024 BY: MARLENY ARNOLDI - DEPUTY EDITOR ONLINE



The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa's (CGA's) Orange Focus Group (OFG) has revised its

forecast export figures for Navel and Valencia oranges further downward owing to extreme weather events in prominent growing regions.

The group's expectation for Navel oranges decreased from 25.6-million 15 kg cartons in May to 22-million cartons in June and 21-million cartons on July 24.

The latest review brings the total reduction for the season to a significant 19%.

Currently, late Navel oranges are being packed and shipped as the season draws to a close, while packing and shipping of Valencia oranges from key growing regions in Limpopo and Mpumalanga are under way.

Growers in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape will only start to pack their first Valencia volumes in earnest in coming weeks.

The Valencia export prediction has dropped from an initial 58-million cartons in May, to 56-million cartons in June and further to 51.6-million with the latest review.

This marks an 11% reduction on the first estimate.

Last year, South Africa packed 24.8-million cartons of Navel oranges and 52.1-million Valencia oranges for export to foreign markets.

The largest downward adjustments reflected in the latest review come out of Letsitele, Hoedspruit and the Senwes (Marble Hall and Groblersdal) areas, where the season's production trends have already revealed itself. Marble Hall and Groblersdal were also hard hit by recent frost damage, further reducing production forecasts.

"The freezing cold in the Senwes region has meant that the Navel estimate in that region has been reduced by 600 000 cartons and the Valencia volumes by one-million cartons. The Western Cape's Citrusdal area has been impacted by recent flooding and storms, while the Eastern Cape has been impacted by high winds," explains OFG chairperson **Stiaan Engelbrecht**.

Storms and winds typically cause fruit to drop from trees, while frost damage also impacts production.

CGA vice-chairperson **Jan-Louis Pretorius** says there will not be an oversupply of oranges this season, rather it will be a balanced market.

He adds that the orange season this year has been unique in that drier and warmer conditions caused fruit sizes to be somewhat smaller, while a very good local juicing price enticed growers to move more oranges to processing.

In the meantime, bad weather in the past weeks have caused challenges for major growers, with orange volumes now being similar to those of the 2017 season – which was characterised by drought in the Western Cape.

While the financial damage to infrastructure caused by the floods in Citrusdal has not yet been calculated, export oranges have started moving out of the town in the past few days through a private bridge on a citrus farm after the valley was cut off.

A provincial disaster was declared after severe rainfall two weeks ago. The Port of Cape Town is back to efficient operation by now, confirms CGA chairperson **Gerrit van der Merwe**.

"Citrus is now moving and disruption has been minimised. People are working hard and can catch up with the delays in about eight to nine days," he concludes.



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