

South African horticulture rebounds in 2024 as global trade shifts

In 2024, South Africa's horticultural sector contributed 23% to the nation's agricultural Gross Value Added. Over the past decade, the sector has averaged a growth rate of 11.4%, maintaining its role as a key provider of employment and foreign exchange.

Despite facing logistical challenges and high input costs, the year 2024 marked a rebound in the profitability of long-term export crops. According to the Autumn 2025 edition of Absa's AgriTrends report, factors such as "agile logistical execution, ongoing market development, and lower volumes out of competing exporting geographies" played a role in this recovery.

While local weather conditions show signs of improvement, global geopolitical instability and fluctuating trade conditions continue to pose uncertainties for the future.

In the citrus industry, orange producers saw a strong revenue year despite a decrease in export volumes. Favourable juice prices, influenced by disease and drought challenges in Brazil, allowed South African growers to benefit. However, the juice market's recovery could limit price growth in 2025, following a nearly 50% price drop from December 2024 peaks.

Lemon exports experienced mixed outcomes in 2024. Spain's initial bumper crop affected prices, but South African growers gained from "lower supply out of other Southern Hemisphere exporters," especially in Argentina, where rain hindered production. EU volumes dropped by around 4%, offering South African producers a chance to gain market share with early lemons.

Table grape production showed positive results for the 2024/25 season, with Northern and Orange River growers capitalizing on high prices in the EU and other markets. China's shift from net importer to exporter, along with its development of competitive varieties, may impact South Africa's future market position.

South African avocado exports performed well in 2024, benefiting from reduced Peruvian volumes. However, Peru's expected market recovery in 2025, along with the Chancay mega-port inauguration, could enhance its access to the Far East market.

In the macadamia sector, a 7.11% crop increase is anticipated for 2025, reaching about 93,433 tons. Yet, economic uncertainty in China and slower Nut In Shell contracting contribute to market uncertainty. Growing macadamia production in China could impact South African prospects.

With these challenges, the macadamia kernel market remains favorable, particularly for high-quality varieties. Analysts expect "market development in terms of ingredients and geographies will continue to support price improvement," though a marketing split between kernels and NIS could limit growth.

The South African horticultural export industry faces both opportunities and challenges, with global market volatility and shifting trade dynamics influencing future prospects.

Source: Food for Mzansi (<https://www.foodformzansi.co.za/horticultural-exports-show-resilience-despite-2024-challenges-agritrends-autumn/>)

Frontpage photo: © Beata Bn | Dreamstime

Publication date: Tue 15 Apr 2025

•

