

Citrus export volumes set to rise 3.6% in 2025, but risks remain

The Southern African citrus industry is forecasting exports of 171.1 million cartons of 10kg citrus for the 2025 season, reflecting a 3.6% increase on last year's final export figures. "We are cautiously optimistic about the season," says Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA).



Source: [Freepik](#)

This outlook comes as the industry maintains its steady growth trajectory, though challenges persist. "The solid growth trajectory the industry has been on has held, so far. But serious threats remain. A significant one for this season is the tariff turmoil that could disrupt the US market for a portion of growers," says Ntshabele.

Ntshabele adds that it is imperative that a trade deal or exemption for seasonal fresh produce be agreed on by the governments of SA and the US before a paused 30% tariff comes into effect in two and a half months' time. Although the US represents only 4% - 6% of SA's citrus exports, the US market is the lifeblood of Western Cape rural towns such as Citrusdal.

The figure for the expected total 2025 citrus exports from SA has been calculated after the estimates for late mandarins were finalised recently. The late mandarin variety estimates show impressive growth and breakdown as follows:

- Leanri - 2.1 million 15kg cartons, slightly down from 2.2 million cartons in 2024
- Orri - 2.1 million 15kg cartons, stable from 2024's 2.1 million cartons
- Nadorcott/Tango - 25.7 million 15kg cartons, up significantly from 23.3 million cartons last year, to young trees coming into production
- Other late mandarins - 3.2 million 15kg cartons, up from 2024's 2.7 million cartons

These estimates come after the CGA released season estimates in March for lemons, oranges, grapefruit and early mandarins. Those figures represented stable growth overall, with:

- Lemons at 32.9 million 15kg cartons, a 5% decrease from 2024
- Navel oranges at 26.1 million 15kg cartons, a 5% increase from 2024
- Valencia orange at 52 million 15kg cartons, a 6% increase from 2024
- Grapefruit at 13.5 million 17kg cartons, also a 6% increase from 2024
- Satsuma (early mandarin) at 1.8 million 15kg cartons, no change from the previous year
- Nova (early Mandarin) at 4.5 million, a 2% increase from 2024
- Clementines (early mandarin) at 5.4 million 15kg cartons, a 10% increase from 2024

"It seems to be a favourable start to the 2025 season so far," highlights Ntshabele. "The early season is mostly dominated by exports of lemons and grapefruit. Lemons are in demand, and the lemon price also looks good. Also, we've exported 55% more grapefruit than last year at this point."

Paul Hardman, chief operating officer of the CGA, says: "If we can address the main challenges our growers face - and these are logistical inefficiencies at our ports, the US tariff uncertainty, existing tariffs in other markets and difficult access to markets like the European Union due to unnecessary phytosanitary (plant health) measures - only then will the citrus success story continue."

As a result of many new plantings over the past few years, the industry can export more citrus, and create 100,000 new jobs to the South African economy by 2032, if these obstacles are removed, added Hardman.

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