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Southern African citrus exports to increase by 3.6% this season – CGA

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The Southern African citrus industry is expected to export 171.1-million 15 kg cartons of citrus in the current season, which would represent 3.6% growth from the preceding year's final export figures, says industry organisation the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA).

"We are cautiously optimistic about the season. 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 our growers," says CGA CEO Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele.

He notes that the current season seems to be experiencing a favourable start.

The early season is mostly dominated by exports of lemons and grapefruit. Lemons are in demand and the lemon price also looks good. CGA members have also exported 55% more grapefruit thus far this season than it had at the same point in the prior year, he points out.

“If we can address the main challenges our growers face, which include the logistical inefficiencies at our ports, the US tariff uncertainty, existing tariffs in other markets and difficult access to markets like the EU owing to unnecessary phytosanitary measures, then the citrus success story will continue,” says CGA COO Paul Hardman.

Additionally, owing to many new plantings over the past few years, the industry can export more citrus and add 100 000 new jobs to the South African economy by 2032, if these obstacles are removed, he adds.

It is imperative that a trade deal or exemption for seasonal fresh produce be agreed on by the governments of South Africa and the US before a paused 30% tariff comes into effect in two and a half months' time.

Although the US represents only 4% to 6% of South Africa's citrus exports, the US market is the lifeblood of Western Cape rural towns such as Citrusdal, Ntshabele says.

Meanwhile, the late mandarin variety estimates show impressive growth with Leanri at 2.1-million 15 kg cartons, which is slightly down from 2.2-million cartons in 2024. Orri exports are at 2.1-million 15 kg cartons, which is stable compared with 2024's 2.1-million cartons.

The figure for Nadorcott/Tango exports is 25.7-million 15 kg cartons, which is significantly up from 23.3-million cartons last year owing to young trees coming into production. Exports of other late mandarins – 3.2-million 15 kg cartons, up from 2024's 2.7-million 15 kg cartons.

The March estimates are for the export of 32.9-million 15 kg cartons of lemon, which is a 5% decrease from 2024, and 26.1-

million 15 kg cartons of navel oranges, which is a 5% increase from 2024.

Further, the figure for Valencia oranges is 52-million 15 kg cartons, which is a 6% increase from 2024, and that for grapefruit 13.5-million 17 kg cartons, which is also a 6% increase from 2024.

The satsuma (early mandarin) figure is 1.8-million 15 kg cartons for March, which shows no change from the previous year.

The figure for Nova (early mandarin) is 4.5-million in March, which is a 2% increase from 2024, and the figure for clementines (early mandarin) is 5.4-million 15 kg cartons, which is a 10% increase from 2024, the CGA says. 

Phone: +27 (0)11 622 3744

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