

Southern African citrus exports to grow despite challenges

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has issued a statement outlining the outlook for the 2025 citrus export season, projecting stable growth despite some significant challenges on the horizon.

The Southern African citrus industry is expected to export a total of 171.1 million cartons of 15kg citrus during the 2025 season. This figure represents a 3.6% increase compared to last year's final export numbers.

"We are cautiously optimistic about the season," said Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the CGA. "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 U.S. market for a portion of our growers."

Ntshabele emphasized the urgency of securing a trade deal or exemption for seasonal fresh produce between the South African and U.S. governments. Without such an agreement, a paused 30% tariff could come into effect in two and a half months.

The 2025 total export figure was finalized after updated estimates for late mandarins were added. Leanri exports are projected at 2.1 million 15kg cartons, slightly down from 2.2 million cartons in 2024. Orri mandarins are expected to remain stable at 2.1 million cartons. Nadorcott/Tango mandarins show strong growth, with 25.7 million cartons projected, up from 23.3 million last year, driven by young trees coming into production. Other late mandarins are estimated at 3.2 million cartons, up from 2.7 million cartons in 2024.

These late mandarin estimates follow the CGA's March release of season estimates for lemons, oranges, grapefruit, and early mandarins. Lemon exports are forecast at 32.9 million 15kg cartons, a 5% decrease from 2024. Navel oranges are expected to grow by 5% to 26.1 million cartons, while Valencia oranges are projected to increase by 6% to 52 million cartons. Grapefruit exports are estimated at 13.5 million 17kg cartons, also a 6% rise. For early mandarins,

Satsuma exports are steady at 1.8 million cartons, Nova mandarins are expected to grow by 2% to 4.5 million cartons, and Clementines are forecast to increase by 10% to 5.4 million cartons.

"It seems to be a favourable start to the 2025 season so far," said Ntshabele. "The early season is mostly dominated by exports of lemons and grapefruit. Lemons are in demand, and lemon prices are looking good. We have also exported 55% more grapefruit than at the same point last year."

Paul Hardman, Chief Operating Officer of the CGA, stressed that the future success of the citrus sector hinges on resolving major challenges. These include logistical inefficiencies at ports, the looming U.S. tariff uncertainty, existing tariffs in other markets, and restricted access to key regions like the European Union due to stringent phytosanitary measures. Hardman added that if these issues are addressed, the citrus industry could further expand exports and contribute an additional 100,000 new jobs to South Africa's economy by 2032.

For more information:

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Publication date: Tue 29 Apr 2025

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