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Export protection essential for South African citrus – CGA

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The US softening its stance on Brazilian orange juice could bode well for the local citrus industry. Source: FSL

South Africa's citrus-producing sector is hedging its bets that the US decision to protect its orange juice supply chain from Brazil by not imposing a 50% tariff increase on imports from its South American trading partner may bode well for local fruit exporters.

Since the US chose to exempt Brazilian juice, it raises the hope that similar exemptions could be extended to other important citrus exporters, Fruitnet has reported.

In a best-case scenario, it could see the local citrus industry avoiding costly tariffs and maintaining competitiveness in the US market.

"The US exemption of Brazilian orange juice represents some good news for citrus in general, and hopefully points towards a precedent for South Africa," says Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) of southern Africa.

“Quality, fresh South African citrus plays a significant role in ensuring year-round supply of citrus for US consumers, and in avoiding possible citrus price increases in the US. We urge the US to take this into account, as well as the fact that we supply citrus when the US growers themselves are out of season.”

Referring to the government’s response after the Trump administration last Thursday implemented 30% tariffs on South African exports to the US, Ntshabele said the CGA welcomed the industry support measures that had been announced.

“We have consistently pointed out the vulnerability of small rural communities to external shocks such as these. We do hope that these measures are implemented expeditiously to protect rural livelihoods.”

In respect of government’s export trade pronouncements around market diversification as a mitigating strategy against “Trump tariffs”, Ntshabele says such measures are already under way at the CGA, especially in view of future growth targets – 260 million 15kg cartons by 2032.

“We already export to over a hundred destinations as the second-biggest citrus exporter in the world. At this level of diversification, and taking into account our growth potential, all markets are crucial.”

He says deepening market access through improved conditions relative to phytosanitary and sanitary measures, including tariffs, is crucial.

“Some of the existing markets are underutilised, precisely because of the higher tariffs levied on our fruit.”

“Perhaps now is the time to work closely through private-public partnerships to fast-track diversification. South Africa should also use the G20 sidebar discussions to advance market diversification with counterparts. The CGA continues to urge the South African government to focus on securing a mutually beneficial trade deal with the US, or a US exemption for seasonal fresh produce.”