

Zimbabwe citrus harvest and exports grow

The harvesting of Valencia and Navel oranges is underway across Zimbabwe, with export earnings from the citrus sector increasing by 27% from US\$12 million in 2023 to US\$15 million in 2024, according to the Horticultural Development Council (HDC).

The HDC reported that harvesting in the southern region has reached its peak. "It is an orange harvesting season in Beitbridge. At Nottingham Estate, the team is packing for both export and the local market," said HDC. Harvesting began in June, with subdued international juice prices.

The April 2025 update highlighted that the Beira port remains a challenge due to higher charges and logistical constraints, leaving growers reliant on the Durban port. New systems for European Union market protocols and audits have been implemented to ensure compliance with international phytosanitary standards.

Alongside oranges, a larger mandarin crop is expected as orchards mature, with anticipated sales to overseas, regional, and local markets. Lemon harvesting began in the northern part of the country in March and ended in May. Initial quality issues were noted, but HDC stated, "These are expected to improve as the season progresses. Market prices are fair and currently stronger than in previous years, but returns, especially for smaller fruit and category two grades, remain marginal due to high freight costs relative to market prices."

The update noted a reduction in lemon hectares, with some orchards being topworked to other varieties and others abandoned. "Despite this, yields and pack outs have improved significantly compared to 2024, particularly in the northern regions where orchards are now reaching year four. Erratic power supplies continue to impact the sector," added the HDC.

According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStats), citrus export value rose 27% from US\$11.8 million in 2023 to US\$15 million in 2024, while volumes declined by 3% from 65,369 tons to 63,465 tons. Citrus exports have increased by 92% since 2017, when they totaled US\$7.8 million. Export categories include fresh or dried oranges, mandarins, grapefruit, lemons, limes, orange juice, and other single fruit juices.

Zimbabwe and China signed a citrus trade protocol in 2015, covering exports of sweet orange, mandarin, grapefruit, lemon, and sour orange. In 2023, the Plant Quarantine Services Institute issued phytosanitary certificates for 46 containers of oranges to China, all shipped via Durban port, averaging 24 tons each. In 2024, only three containers totaling 76 tons were exported to China, again routed through Durban, as cold sterilisation facilities at Beira do not meet the requirements of the Zimbabwe-China protocol.

Source: The Herald (<https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/orange-harvesting-peaks/>)

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