

"South Africa citrus growers remained committed to U.S. market despite tariffs"

The South African citrus season has wrapped up and Summer Citrus from South Africa reflects on this past season and talks in more detail about the program that has been in existence for more than 25 years.

Citrusdal is the main production area for oranges, easy peelers, grapefruit and lemons that make their way over to the U.S. For phytosanitary reasons, this region in the Western Cape, together with the Northern Cape, are the only citrus production regions in South Africa with access to the U.S. market.

Counter seasonal

From the day the collaboration between South African growers and U.S. importers was established, the group has held true to their business model of managing supply and demand. "It has always been our mission to complement local U.S. citrus production by offering the U.S. consumer fresh, sweet, and delicious citrus in the summer months, when otherwise unavailable," says Suhanra Conradie with Summer Citrus from South Africa. "We are counter-seasonal and do not intend to compete with domestic U.S. production. We disappear as soon as the California season starts towards the end of October, depending on the season."



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Program based on demand

Collectively, all service providers have invested in this program for more than 25 years. Every year, a lot of planning goes into executing a program that is based on managing supply and demand. "Only shipping fruit that has a solid home and putting the demand of the market first, is what makes this program so successful." It is always a balancing act of matching available supply, with the demand of the market. Typically, the first volume starts to drip into the U.S. market by the end of the May, but the bulk of volume arrives between June and September.

It has never been an easy program, but this year, a challenge was added when tariffs were implemented on all citrus items being exported from South Africa to the U.S. Because of its perishable nature, citrus needs to be harvested when ready and growers and shippers had to continue exporting. Although the tariffs had a huge impact on all supply chain providers, shipments to the U.S. continued steadily. "The industry continued to focus on getting high-quality fruit on the water and executing the program with excellence, showing the commitment to the U.S." All service providers worked together to ensure the economics continued to make sense and despite the tariffs, the season's targets were exceeded, and a record volume was exported.



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William Kopke, Managing Director of William Kopke Jr. and Suhanra Conradie at Kopke's facility on the East Coast. In the background is citrus from South Africa.

Oranges exempt from tariffs

After the season had been concluded, it was announced that oranges will be exempt from tariffs going forward. Since South Africa is fully counter seasonal, the group is hopeful easy peelers, grapefruit, and lemons will also be included in the exemption. "We can't just provide the U.S. market with oranges, we need to offer our full fruit basket," Conradie shared. Although the South African citrus industry isn't fully out of the woods just yet, the industry will be back in business for the 2026 season. By the end of February, the group will be ready to talk in more detail about the upcoming 2026 season.

Click on the video for a recap of the season.

SC25 December overview V2



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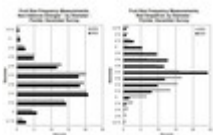
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