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Citrus industry growth should be focus of upcoming agriculture budget

4TH JULY 2025 BY: [SCHALK BURGER](#) - CREAMER MEDIA SENIOR DEPUTY EDITOR

Industry organisation the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) hopes to see urgent and shared concern about facilitating agricultural growth during the Budget Vote address by Agriculture Minister **John Steenhuisen** next week.

Improved market access, ever-vigilant biosecurity and improved logistics are key priorities outlined by the CGA that it says will help the citrus industry grow and export a total of 260-million 15 kg cartons by 2032.

Citrus is South Africa's largest agricultural export industry, contributing R34-billion in foreign revenue each season. With a massive increase in citrus production projected for the next few years, a key priority should be improved market access for the fruit, the association states.

Without improved access in all markets, and opening new markets, the increase in citrus production cannot be channelled into new jobs, says CGA CEO Dr **Boitshoko Ntshabele**.

“In the current uncertain trade environment and with the economic pressures many growers experience, continued growth in our sector should not be taken for granted; it requires constant action from a range of role-players.

“This year’s citrus export season is now at its peak. Projections are that it will be another record year, with just over 171-million 15 kg cartons of citrus expected to be exported by the end of October,” he says.

Further, uncertainty regarding US import tariffs is causing anxiety as growers are increasingly unable to plan for the full season.

Securing favourable access to the US market should be a priority, as should improving access to China and India, which currently impose tariffs on South African citrus.

“The US, Chinese and Indian markets offer immense promise for growth in the future. As a general rule of thumb, every ten-million cartons of citrus that South Africa exports creates close to 10 000 jobs, changing lives in rural towns like Letsitele, Addo and Citrusdal,” says CGA chairperson **Gerrit van der Merwe**.

Access to the citrus industry’s largest export market, the EU, can also be improved considerably through the favourable conclusion of the current World Trade Organisation disputes on the EU’s unscientific and unnecessary trade measures on Citrus Black Spot and False Coddling Moth.

The CGA hopes to continue working closely with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, as well as the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition on all the above market access issues, he adds.

Further, the CGA also welcomes Steenhuisen's recent remarks on the importance of biosecurity to South Africa's economic and social welfare. The CGA looks forward to his continued leadership in this important matter.

“The international citrus trade is dependent on robust procedures, inspections and rapid response plans. Ever-improving plant health vigilance can prevent biosecurity crises similar to some we have recently seen in other industries,” says Ntshabele.

The CGA stresses the need for decision-makers to urgently accelerate logistics reforms. Central to agricultural growth is the ability to move produce to foreign markets in a reliable and timely way, he highlights.

“While we have seen some improved port efficiency, and there have been no significant delays so far this season, the only long-term solution to the highly unpredictable logistics landscape in South Africa is increased private sector participation.

“These projects must be facilitated at a much faster pace if more citrus is to be exported in the next few years,” says CGA COO Paul Hardman.

“There will be no real growth in export agriculture without structural reforms at the ports and on the rail network. We hope the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Transport remain aligned on this crucial issue,” he says.

“In times of economic pressure, cooperation is vital to the realisation of mutual benefit, whether it is between trading partners, the public and private sectors or government departments.

“We trust the priorities set out during the agriculture budget debate will take into account what is required for our industry to contribute substantially to job creation in South Africa,” says Ntshabele. 

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