BL Business Day

ECONOMY

Citrus industry urges priority in agriculture budget vote as exports surge

Industry calls for reforms because citrus export targets hinge on market access and logistics

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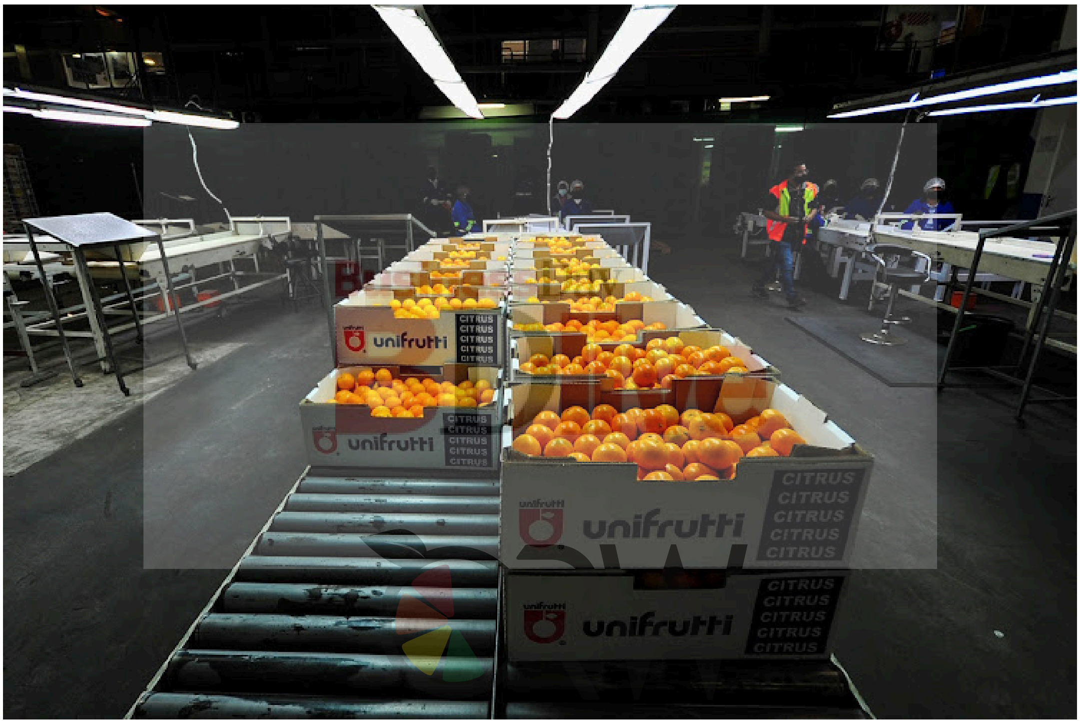
by JANA MARX



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The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has called for urgent action on market access, biosecurity and logistics as the agriculture sector prepares for the upcoming budget vote debate in parliament on Tuesday.

The industry aims to grow exports to 260-million 15kg cartons by 2032 — a target that hinges on decisive policy support.

"The CGA hopes to see urgent and shared concern about facilitating agricultural growth," the association said in a statement.

"We trust the priorities set out during the agriculture budget debate this coming Tuesday will take into account what is required for our industry to contribute substantially to job creation in SA," said CGA CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele.

The CGA expects the current export season to set another record, with more than 171-million 15kg cartons projected to be shipped by October, he said, adding that the current "uncertain trade environment, and considering the economic pressures many of our growers experience, continued growth in our sector should not be taken for granted".

"It requires constant action from a range of role players," he said.

Citrus is SA's largest agricultural export industry, contributing R34bn in foreign revenue per season. Yet tariffs and regulatory hurdles are undermining the sector's potential.

Gerrit van der Merwe, CGA chair, emphasised the stakes: "Every 10 million cartons SA exports creates close to 10,000 jobs, changing lives in rural towns like Letsitele, Addo and Citrusdal."

That is why securing better terms with the US, China and India should be a priority, the CGA emphasised. According to the association, both China and India are now imposing tariffs on SA citrus.

"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 said.

Beyond trade, logistics remain a persistent concern.

Paul Hardman, the association's COO, said accelerating private sector participation is the only long-term solution to SA's "highly unpredictable" logistics landscape.

"There will be no real growth in export agriculture without structural reforms at ports and on the rail network," Hardman said. "We hope the department of agriculture and the department of transport remain aligned on this crucial issue."

However, it seems that things are improving, albeit slowly.

SAAFF (SA Association of Freight Forwarders) CEO Juanita Maree this week congratulated Transnet on its "hard work" in driving structural reforms.

"We are seeing meaningful progress and renewed operational capacity from Transnet," she said, adding that according to the past two weeks' Busa/SAAFF cargo movement update the ports also performed "above target".

Business Day last week reported how Transnet will seek private sector investment in the refurbishment or expansion of its rail infrastructure.

This ahead of the finalisation of the formal private sector participation process, which according to transport minister Barbara Creecy will take some time.

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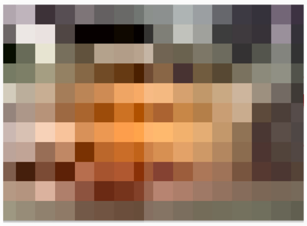

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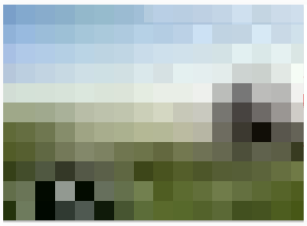

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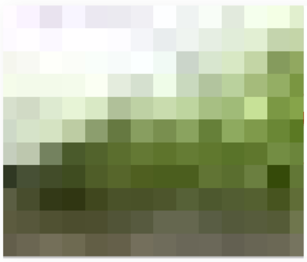

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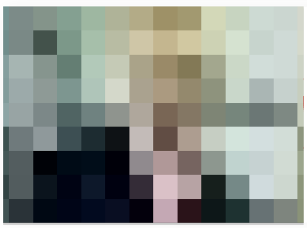

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