

Fresh from Limpopo:

First co-branded citrus boxes will arrive soon in India

With the South African citrus season underway in India, importers are noticing more consistent, high-quality arrivals of oranges and mandarins at key ports. Unmesh Suryawanshi, Indian representative for global fresh produce trader Don Limon, says, "Unlike boom and bust cycles of some origins, South African fruit arrives on time, in shape, and with the shelf appeal consumers appreciate."



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This season's success stems not just from higher volumes but from a shift in Indian buying habits. "Indian buyers are prioritizing quality. While Egyptian citrus still leads volume-wise, South African fruit is gaining favor for reliability and superior taste, boosted by appearance and easy peel," Suryawanshi explains. Varieties like Nadorcott mandarins and late-season Navels are praised for bright skin, seedless convenience, and balanced sweetness, leading to fewer consumer complaints. "Fruits that peel easily without staining fingers sell quickly," he adds.

Don Limon plans to introduce varieties like seedless lemons and late-season mandarins, including Orri and Tango, in metro markets such as Mumbai, Bangalore, and Delhi to add retail variety. "Given India's climate challenges for lemons, South African fruit's size and juiciness will help fill supply gaps. We will also trial smaller pre-packed mandarin boxes to suit Indian retail and household preferences, Suryawanshi notes.



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Another significant development this season for Don Limon is its partnership with Letaba, South Africa's citrus grower and processor. Their first co-branded container of Valencia oranges is expected to arrive in India by the end of July, underlining a commitment to transparency and quality. "This isn't just a logo on a box—it's a commitment to transparency, quality, and freshness that travels well," says Suryawanshi, highlighting how the partnership aims to connect Limpopo's orchards directly to Indian homes.

However, importing South African citrus is not without its share of challenges. "A 33% import duty restricts pricing in sensitive markets. Also, in-transit cold treatment isn't yet approved, requiring precise planning," Suryawanshi explains. "Logistical hurdles at Indian ports pressure the perishables supply chain. Don Limon minimizes risks by shipping only when fruit is ready and maintaining a strict cold chain from origin to retailer. We work closely with port officials and logistics partners knowledgeable about perishables," he adds.



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Prices for South African citrus have remained steady. "Early competition from Egyptian shipments kept prices soft through July, but with rising appreciation for quality and logistical improvements, prices are expected to firm up in the coming weeks."

Suryawanshi remains optimistic about the weeks ahead: "We plan to expand from Mumbai to Chennai and other ports, broadening reach in southern and eastern India and reducing transit times. We also aim to build grassroots retail partnerships in Tier 2 and 3 cities with support from Indian partners Scion Agricos and DB Ursal & Grandsons. Our goal is to make quality South African citrus accessible to more consumers," he concludes.

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