

South African fruit industry seeks new markets as US tariffs threaten export growth

By [Fred Meintjes](#) | 18 July 2025

While citrus may escape major damage this season, stonefruit and table grape sectors face critical decisions ahead of new seasons, with industry leaders emphasising the need for market diversification amid changing trade dynamics



The impact of impending US tariffs will influence South African fruit exporters in markets around the world and the fresh produce industry is facing some tough decisions.

While the citrus industry will probably emerge from this season with limited damage, the stonefruit and table grape sectors will face some tough decisions over the next two months before their new seasons start.

While South African fruit growers are hoping that last minute deals between South Africa and the US could still soften the Trump administration's stance, there is now wide recognition that a new future in trade with the US has arrived.

In South Africa there has been pressure on all exporters to diversify their marketing strategies in the light of the new situation.

"We have to do everything we can to retain our position in the UK and Europe," Alwyn Dippenaar, Chairman of SATI, recently told growers.

It is also clear that markets in the Middle East and Asia will have to feature strongly in new strategies.

For both South African grapes and stonefruit, the US market has shown strong growth over the past two years, and both businesses have focused their promotional and market development efforts there over the past two years.

The new tariffs will, however, force a major rethink of this strategy.

This also comes at a time when South African grape exporters have endured a tough time in China, a market they entered with great optimism some years ago.

This demonstrates that it will not be easy to substitute new markets for the present, seemingly lucrative US market.

South African industry leaders are emphasising that they need access to all markets in the world to meet future growth prospects.

So, during US turmoil, where are the silver linings?

The recent announcement by China to extend free trade to 53 leading African countries, including South Africa, may be a catalyst for the future of fruit in that country, ensuring that South Africans can be more competitive.

A high-level South African government delegation, including the trade and industry and agricultural ministers, have been in China, with the fortunes of South African fruit growers surely high on the agenda.

The development and adoption of a new trade agreement between South African and India will be boosted soon by a senior Indian delegation visiting South Africa.

EUROFRUIT have so far dampened what is seen as spectacular progress for some South African products in India.

The South African fresh produce industry has responded by launching market development programmes for apples and pear and citrus to create more awareness of the country, its fruit and its origin.

South African avocado producers are also supporting the World Avocado Association's awareness programme in India.

The latest suggestion that South Africans are serious about restoring the prospects for grapefruit, meanwhile, has been the launch of red Star Ruby grapefruit as an exciting, sweet and tasty new product that will appeal to all consumers in Europe.

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