

South African citrus shipments continue ahead of August tariff deadline

While the future of shipments after August 1st remains uncertain given the U.S. 30 percent tariff threat on citrus from South Africa, for now, steady supply continues arriving. "The timing of maturity was slightly advanced this season, so we saw better accessibility of higher brix clementines for our Peelz program," says Kevin Carroll of Fowler Packing. "We saw about 25 percent more shipments year-on-year exported from South Africa over the first six weeks of the season."



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The shipments of mandarins, which the company markets year-round under the Peelz brand, began arriving in the first and second weeks of June. Meanwhile, navel oranges started arriving in the past two weeks, following the marketing order of July 1st for imported fruit. Typically, the season finishes in late September or mid-October.

Following this week's tariff threat, South African citrus growers and shippers are trying to determine where to go from here. "The reality is, most feel if the 30 percent does hold on August 1st, exporters will likely slow shipments and/or divert most of the U.S.-destined supply. We're all waiting to see what happens," says Carroll.

Transition to imports

Meanwhile, demand has been fairly good for South African citrus. This time of year, it can be challenging transitioning from domestic late mandarins to the early import crop. "Quality can take a bit of a dip with some early easy-peeler varieties from alternative countries of origin. However, because the crop timing in South Africa was a bit advanced, it allowed for an ample supply of good clementines to support a smooth transition for Peelz customers from domestic into imports," Carroll says. "We've been happy with the internals. It's been a strong year for eating quality."



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Carroll also says Peelz is gaining strong traction at the register this season, with meaningful growth across the import program. Retailers partnering with Peelz are seeing positive results, a sign that shoppers continue to trust the quality of the brand.

Looking ahead, while growers and shippers may be mulling over a plan B to ship South African fruit to potential markets such as Europe if the tariffs go ahead, there is a bit of a bright spot for the U.S. market. "Peru and Chile are forecasting strong volumes of high-quality late mandarins. So, we should not feel the shortage as much on the back side of the season, compared to if earlier tariff concerns held back clementine shipments," says Carroll, who says it's in its fourth year with the Peelz brand, which has seen significant support from South African citrus in growing the program. "By August, with late mandarins, you have alternatives that you didn't have in June."

For more information:

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