

Citrus growers urge Ramaphosa to intervene as US tariff deadline looms

With less than a week until the US is set to impose a 30% tariff on citrus imports from South Africa, the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has called on President Cyril Ramaphosa to act urgently to prevent economic damage to key agricultural region



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"This week, with the tariff deadline on Friday, is one of great anxiety for the citrus growers in the Western and Northern Cape. These two provinces annually export about 7 million cartons to the US," said Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the CGA.

Call for extension or perishable-specific reprieve

The CGA is requesting that the President negotiate an extension of the current 10% tariff on citrus exports to the US beyond August 1. Failing that, the association has urged government to seek a specific concession for perishable seasonal fresh produce.

According to the CGA, the timing of the tariff increase could be devastating, as the industry has just passed the midpoint of its 2025 export season. "Hundreds of thousands of cartons of citrus are currently in packhouses to be shipped to the US over the next few weeks. The implementation of a 30% tariff on 1 August will mean most of this fruit will be left unsold," said Dr Ntshabele.

No threat to US producers

The CGA argues that South African citrus enters the US market during the American off-season, complementing local supply rather than competing with it.

"Citrus as a source of nutrition also helps to keep America healthy," said Dr Ntshabele. "Should we be able to secure a favourable trade deal, or the concession for fresh produce, local job losses by the next season will be a certainty."

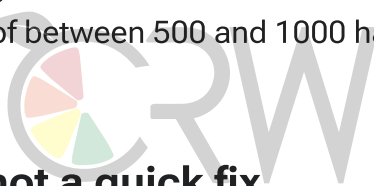
Rural communities face job and revenue losses

CGA Chairperson Gerrit van der Merwe, who farms in Citrusdal, said the pending tariff hike will have far-reaching consequences for farming towns in the Western and Northern Cape.

"Being a grower in Citrusdal, I am very worried about the effect the tariffs will have on our town and wider Cederberg municipality. Citrus forms the economic heart of the area. Not just farmers and farm workers will feel the impact, local businesses and even the funding of social support programmes will be affected as well. The social fabric of some rural towns in the Western and Northern Cape is being threatened."



Van der Merwe added that citrus growers estimate between 500 and 1,000 hectares of orchards could be lost due to the unsustainability of a 30% tariff. "A 30% tariff could not only stifle future growth, but lead to the eventual destruction of between 500 and 1000 ha that would simply become unprofitable," he said.



Market diversification not a quick fix

In its letter to the President, the CGA noted that rerouting fruit to alternative markets is not straightforward, as different export destinations require specific plant health protocols and quality standards.

"Citrus is grown for designated markets, each with their own precise market and plant health specifications. Therefore, it is not easy to simply divert citrus from the US and find a new market. Should some citrus be diverted away from the US, the diversion could very well depress the price in these markets through oversupply, negatively impacting the entire Southern African citrus industry."

Sector potential at risk

The CGA says the citrus industry could create 100,000 additional jobs by 2032 due to new plantings, but this depends on continued market growth across the US, China, India, the EU and others.

While acknowledging some recent progress in trade negotiations, the CGA believes more direct diplomatic efforts are needed before the deadline. "It is of the opinion that more direct and active

contact with the US is necessary before the 1 August deadline," the CGA said.

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