

South Africa citrus on its way to the U.S. despite uncertainties around tariffs

South Africa's citrus season started off slower than usual. However, harvest picked up about three weeks ago and is in full swing now. "We are packing a really good volume for the U.S. market as we speak and are focusing on the execution of our program," says Suhanra Conradie with Summer Citrus from South Africa. "In the past three weeks, we've been able to catch up on volume and are now where we would like to be at this time during the season." By the end of this week, about one third of the planned volume will be packed.



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Fruit can't wait for tariff negotiations to resolve

Prior to the start of harvest, the announcement of the tariffs back in April created some initial uncertainty for growers and shippers. "Currently, we can say that we will be able to deliver on our commitments to the supply chain service providers and retailers," Conradie said. Citrus is a perishable commodity, forcing everyone to go through the motions of the supply chain. "The reality is that we work with a

commodity with an ever-changing life cycle and the fruit needs to be harvested when it is ready and shipped accordingly. This is the nature of the citrus export business. We don't have the luxury of time - like other dry commodities do - to wait for the negotiations to be resolved."

In addition to the perishable nature, many parties involved in the program have been working together for 25 years. Collectively, all service providers have invested a lot of effort into this program. This wasn't only done to build a sustainable long-term business into the U.S., but also to establish themselves as the preferred supplier of citrus into the U.S. during the summer months. "None of the service providers throughout the total supply chain would just walk away from a successful program like this," Conradie mentioned. As a result, the industry has been focusing on getting high-quality fruit on the water and executing this program with excellence. She is hopeful the governments of South Africa and the U.S. will come to some sort of conclusion or an extension of the current situation for the remainder of the citrus season.



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First arrivals 3rd week of June

The first fruit is now in transit and is scheduled to arrive on the U.S. East Coast during the third week of June. From then on, weekly shipments will arrive. "The departure of the first vessels has created stability in the supply chain and all service providers are now focused on execution of the program, which means shipping based on the demand of the market." Fortunately, there is enough fruit in the pipeline to adhere to the demand of the market. The majority of the early fruit

consists of easy peelers, complemented with some volume of Navel oranges. From this point on in the season, volume will shift towards Navel oranges as well as Star Ruby grapefruit.

Dedicated break bulk vessels will arrive in Gloucester, NJ and Summer Citrus from South Africa also has a seasonal container port call into Philadelphia PA, with the majority handled by MSC and some by Maersk. "For us, it's really important that our fruit arrives in the Philadelphia area," commented Conradie. "That's where our infrastructure as well as our importers, repack facilities and retailers are."



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High-quality fruit

Conradie is positive about the quality of the fruit. "We've had really nice, sunny winter weather lately. At the same time, we're getting decent cold units and some rain in between, resulting in a good mix of ideal weather conditions that produce a really good piece of fruit. "We promote ourselves as shipping and selling the world's finest summer citrus and I feel, we really have a superior piece of fruit that complements U.S. local production," she added. The rainy season is now starting and while it's not expected to have an impact on the quality of the fruit, it may temporarily slowdown production at some stage. "This is very typical as we have a Mediterranean like climate with warm summers and cooler winters."

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