

Ilze Brand – Fresh-Pride

South African citrus industry in very bullish mood



© Fresh-Pride "It's a very interesting season again," remarks Ilze Brand (*right*), Fresh-Pride procurement director. Fresh-Pride, part of the Fruitful-Ventures group, which includes Olympic Fruit and Hoofman-Roodzant, is an importer and exporter for the Middle and Far East, South East Asia, India, Africa, and Southeastern Europe.

Brand remarks that it seems there's no end to the appetite for South African citrus. "Lemons are having a brilliant season, grapefruit sales have been stable till now, and demand for oranges is growing. The exception is soft citrus sales in the Middle East, which are currently struggling."

Furthermore, there are no vessel delays across any of South Africa's ports at this time, which the Citrus Growers' Association Mitchel Brooke calls "a very unique and encouraging situation."

"It's great to see growers doing well, despite the challenging business environment they face. A successful 2025 citrus season is much needed, as many growers are still recovering financially from the disastrous 2022 campaign," says Brand.

The industry was a bit concerned about Argentina loading, up 30% on 2024, with very little lemons to the USA during the early season, instead putting down a lot of fruit into Europe and Russia. That fruit would have started to arrive by now, Brand says, but she cannot yet see its impact on markets. This is because the Northern Hemisphere season ended so early, leaving a lot of space for imported lemons.

The Middle East is the market to watch

"The pricing on the lemons is firm in all markets. It's down from the very high prices, especially in the EU, but still at good levels. The Middle East is the market to watch: it has received 20% more lemons to date than last season and at a much higher price. Both suppliers and buyers have been very bullish, especially in the Middle East."

She notes that it's important for growers to work with the right partners; the market could quickly change.

"As of week 24, South Africa shipped 19 million cartons of lemons, which is 12% more than last year. The Senwes and Hoedspruit areas ended up with more lemons than expected. Now the focus turns to the Sundays River Valley, which is about 40% of South Africa's total lemon exports. They've had a slow start to the season," she says.



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South East Asia warming up

Benjamin Choy, Fresh-Pride's Asian commercial manager, is based in Singapore. He observes that the demand for South African citrus in Southeast Asia has been particularly strong this year.

"It's driven by a combination of reduced supply from Egypt and China, resulting in a strong demand which carried over into the current South African season."

Furthermore, slower shipments from South Africa have contributed to overall prices in the region being, on average, USD 1 to 2 higher per carton compared to previous years.



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