

Nikki Ferreira & Hendrik van der Merwe - Ultimate Produce

Upbeat maiden season for citrus exporter



© Ultimate Produce A new citrus exporter came onto the scene this year when Hendrik van der Merwe and Nikki Ferreira established Ultimate Produce. "Our main origin is the Eastern Cape, but fruit drawn from the north of the country allows a wider cultivar window and a complete service to our clients," Ferreira says.

Right: the Nadorcott harvest is carefully getting underway in the Eastern Cape; some farmers giving it a last few days on the tree

"The arrival reports on our lemons and Star Ruby grapefruit have confirmed that the quality is excellent this year. The same for the Novas, and we're very positive about our first navels."

Navels grown in the Eastern Cape are known for their good interiors. Some seasons there are incidences of creasing, but not this season. However, Ferreira adds, weaker internal quality on early navels from other areas concerns him: it could negatively influence markets and drag down the price levels on Eastern Cape navels.

Starting this week, they'll load out oranges and late mandarins to China. Despite the growth of Chinese mandarin production, the marketing of Novas there pleasantly surprised them: not as challenging as expected, says Hendrik van der Merwe, managing director of Ultimate Produce.

"Prices for Novas have been unusually strong and the first sales in China have also been good, but the larger volumes exported by China to the Middle East and India have begun placing pressure on the prices in those markets."



© Ultimate Produce *Ultimate Produce: Eastern Cape navels renowned for their internal quality*

Zesty lemon season

In the European Union, lemons have been performing very well, he adds, and they expect that price levels could lift again as Spain is at the very end of its lemon campaign. South African lemons have also fared well in the Middle East this year, Ferreira says. "Statistics show that lemon shipments were well-timed and spread out, since the EU and the Middle East were demonstrating strong demand."

He continues: "In the Far East, we're experiencing a strong pull for lemons, particularly because Chinese production in 2024/2025 decreased." A lower supply of Chinese-grown lemons resulted in an increase in enquiries from Russian buyers.

"In the Middle East, our main markets remain Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates. Our clients have not mentioned to us any concerns

regarding trade with Iran," he says. South African fruit exports to Iran ended in the 2007/8 season because of international sanctions, bringing an end to direct fruit trade between South Africa and Iran.

Another potential source of uncertainty concerns the UK's possible re-adoption of European Union trade rules.

"We suspect that the UK won't soon be returning to the EU bloc's trade rules, but with the current unpredictability regarding geopolitical issues, you've got to be prepared for everything. In years like this, there's never enough fruit," he remarks, "but it's important to still cultivate and retain relationships to carry you through whatever future seasons may bring. Geopolitical uncertainties do pose challenges, but also bring new opportunities along with them."



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Well-timed lemon shipments coupled with a strong market pull



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