

South Africa citrus industry targets growth amid challenges

While the South African citrus industry faces a period of uncertainty, its long-term growth prospects remain strong if key challenges are addressed, particularly regarding market access and logistics. This was a central message at the 5th Citrus Summit, hosted by the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) in Gqeberha from 11–13 March, where stakeholders from across the industry gathered.

In his keynote address, Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen praised the citrus industry as a national success story, highlighting its significant role in creating jobs in rural communities. However, he expressed concern over the potential elimination of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which facilitates exports to the USA. He warned that its removal could endanger thousands of jobs and disrupt the citrus value chain. Steenhuisen urged stakeholders to prioritize AGOA's renewal or, alternatively, to secure favorable trade tariffs and agreements. He also stressed the importance of expanding into new markets, particularly in Asia, the Middle East, and India.

Incoming CGA CEO Dr. Boitshoko Ntshabele emphasized the industry's capacity for expansion, noting that increased market access could help create 100,000 new jobs by 2032. He stated that production could grow from the current 95 million 15kg cartons to 260 million cartons, enabling greater export potential.

Addressing logistical challenges, Transnet Group CEO Michelle Phillips detailed the company's progress in improving rail and port infrastructure. She announced that the rail network is now open to private operators, promoting a more competitive system. She added that R3.4 billion in equipment acquisitions had been made across eight terminals in 2024/2025, with R4 billion more planned for five terminals in 2025/2026.

Logistics expert Thomas Eskesen echoed this urgency, stating that a Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) study estimating R5.27 billion in annual losses from port inefficiencies likely underrepresents the true cost to the citrus sector.

Eric Imbert, lead researcher from CIRAD, the French agricultural research center, remarked that South Africa's citrus industry is well-positioned to navigate current global trade challenges. He pointed to the country's diversified market, strong industry organization, innovative research capacity, and broad variety range as competitive advantages.

Technological innovation was also featured at the summit. Anya Jaworksi, Business Intelligence Manager at SAFRESCO, demonstrated how artificial intelligence can be used to track citrus supply to Europe, helping manage seasonal demand and supply imbalances through predictive modeling.

Outgoing CGA CEO Justin Chadwick, who served for 25 years, reflected on the importance of collaboration during uncertain times. Dr Ntshabele echoed this sentiment, reinforcing that alignment across the supply chain—from orchards to ports and boardrooms—is essential to ensure the industry's continued success. He concluded by expressing optimism for the 2025 citrus season, emphasizing the need for unified action to realize the sector's full potential.

For more information:

Loftus Marais

Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa

Tel: +27 072 833 0717

Email: loftus@resolvecommunications.co.za

www.cga.co.za (<https://www.cga.co.za/>)

Frontpage photo: © Barmalini | Dreamstime

Publication date: Fri 14 Mar 2025

•

