

South Africa aims to complement local U.S. citrus production

While the U.S.' domestic citrus season is still in full swing, planning is already underway for the summer import program from South Africa. "Although citrus from South Africa won't be in stores until June, this is the time of year retailers start to talk about their programs," says Suhanra Conradie with Summer Citrus from South Africa (SCSA). For the very first time, the group attended Southern Exposure in Orlando earlier this month. "The timing was really good for us as it gave us an opportunity to talk with retailers and get a feel for the volume they require this season. We still have time, but planning has started as we need to put the supply chain in place well ahead of time. We really had some great facetime with important decision makers during the show," she said.

For now, South Africa is expecting a normal citrus crop that should adhere to the demand of the U.S. market. The first fruit will be packed in April, starting with clementines. From there, the season will move into Navel oranges, followed by the later mandarin varieties, and Star Ruby grapefruit. Towards the end of the season, Midnight oranges will be available. "While limited volume will be available in the U.S. market at the end of May, we're really only in U.S. stores from June onwards."



Considerate of local production

SCSA's mission is to complement local production and supply the U.S. market with fresh, sweet, and delicious citrus fruit in summer, the country's domestic offseason. "Our transparent communication throughout the total supply chain is really what sets us apart from our competitors and most of our service providers refer to it as "second-to-none". For retailers especially, it is very important to know when we will arrive into the market and with what kind of volume." SCSA makes sure growers, shippers, shipping lines, ports and importers stay informed. Importers and retailers know ahead of time what's coming in terms of varieties and volume, providing stability in the market. "Having real-time information is the key to making informed decisions and is in line with our business model of managing supply and demand."



High quality is the golden rule

Conradie believes there is a place in the U.S. market for citrus from all countries of origin as long as a high-quality product and a good eating piece of fruit are provided. "That certainly is the golden rule," she said. "We focus on sending exceptional quality product to the U.S. and differentiate with a sophisticated supply chain." This upcoming season again, fruit will be shipped on dedicated break bulk vessels. In addition, the group has negotiated a seasonal port call with MSC into Philadelphia, which has really worked out well in recent years. Maersk has also indicated they will call Philadelphia. "We really want to be on both sides of the Delaware river with our fruit, sustaining our program and catering for anticipated growth, if the demand is there." With weekly arrivals on the U.S. East Coast, the program aims for a smooth sailing.

For more than 25 years, SCSA has been shipping citrus fruit from South Africa to the U.S. "We've been fortunate to work with great partners, whether it's growers, shipping partners, service providers, supply chain providers, importers, or retailers, and all of them acknowledge our well-recognized model of collaboration of "selling a country with confidence". As a result, we've gained trust from retailers, and they ask for/prefer our fruit. There is just a very positive perception around citrus from South Africa in the marketplace and we are confident we'll be able to live up to the expectations again this upcoming season." While challenges are real, the group is optimistic and realistic about what lies ahead. "We really have an excellent group of service providers, as we have gained a lot momentum with our collaborative approach, and intend to keep it going."

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