

First South African citrus estimate shows balanced growth

By [Fred Meintjes](#) | 24 March 2025

The Citrus Growers Association says there will not be an over- or undersupply of South African citrus this year



The first South African citrus forecast of 2025 has been released, with all available data projecting exports in line with the five-year average.

According to Gerrit van der Merwe, chairman of the Citrus Growers Association (CGA), this meant there would be sufficient fruit for all global markets, with no over- or undersupply.

In predicting stable conditions, he said overall quality of the fruit for 2025 looked to be excellent.

“The breakdown of various variety estimates indicates a balanced season ahead,” he confirmed.

In terms of lemons, the current prediction is an export crop of 32.9mn 15kg cartons, 5 per cent less than last year.

“Estimates for citrus-producing regions the Sundays River Valley, Senwes (Marble Hall and Groblersdal), Boland and Patensie are all down, but Hoedspruit is estimated to increase its lemon production,” van der Merwe noted.

“Early lemons have already exported to several markets, especially to the Middle East, Russia and Canada.”

Volumes of Navel and Valencia oranges are expected to be up this year.

“Predictions show a 5 per cent increase in export volume for Navel oranges, at 26.1mn 15kg cartons available for packing,” he continued. “The Orange focus group has, for the first time, split estimates into early/mid Navels (11.34mn cartons) and late Navels (14.75mn cartons) to improve tracking.”

Unusual weather events last year, such as floods in the Western Cape and frost in Limpopo, affected Navel exports but, weather-permitting, volumes are expected to improve in 2025.

After four years of slight declines in Valencia figures, exports are likely to improve in 2025. An increase on 2024 figures of 6 per cent to 52mn 15kg cartons is projected.

“The possible impact of juicing prices on this figure is not yet quantifiable,” said van der Merwe. “Last year unusually high local processing prices suppressed exports of Valencia oranges.”

Grapefruit exports are also predicted to increase. The 6 per cent growth figure translates into 13.5mn 17kg cartons, with the peak period for grapefruit exports expected to be between middle April and mid-May.

“The grapefruit focus group is also embarking on a new marketing project this season, aiming to drive an increase in grapefruit consumption amongst a younger target audience in the European market,” he noted.

Two early mandarin varieties are showing supply stability. The Satsuma season is likely to again, as in 2024, close around the 1.8mn 15kg cartons mark.

The Nova season is showing a slight 2 per cent decrease to 4.5mn cartons, while the third early mandarin variety, Clementines, have presented a solid increase of 10 per cent, with exports expected to increase to 5.4mn cartons.

EUROFRUIT The mandarin varieties will only be made next month when more accurate production data is available.

Van der Merwe said that long-term projections showed, if all role-players worked together to address challenges, the industry could reach its target of exporting 260mn cartons by 2032 – and in the process create 100,000 new jobs.

Two of the biggest obstacles to achieving this target remain deficient rail and port logistics and the EU's "unnecessary" phytosanitary measures regarding citrus black spot (CBS) and false codling moth (FCM), he explained.

"The CGA is grateful for progress made by Transnet in terms of equipment acquisitions at ports, but the only long-term way to achieve the needed efficiency is through the structural change that only public sector participation can bring," said Mitchell Brooke, the CGA's logistics development manager.

[A recent study by the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy \(BFAP\)](#) found that the total cost of inefficient logistics to the citrus industry amounted to R5.27bn per year.

The EU's "restrictive and unscientific measures on CBS and FCM", according to the CGA, were the focus of two historic cases at the World Trade Organisation's trade dispute body.

"We hope for swift progress on the cases, but disputes like these take time," explained Justin Chadwick, outgoing chief executive of the CGA.

"We remain optimistic for the issue to be finalised before the 2026 season," he added. "Every season the measures cost SA's growers no less than R3.7bn, keeping especially emerging growers out of the EU market."