

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

South Africa's citrus export season gets under way

Yesterday - by Staff reporter



Source: Fresh Fruit Portal

The southern African citrus industry is expected to export a total of 171.1 million cartons of 15-kilogram citrus in the 2025 season.

The final figure of citrus exports last year was 164.5 million cartons.

This is according to the latest forecast of the SA Citrus Growers' Association, highlighted in CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele's newsletter released on Friday.

"There seems to be a favourable start to the 2025 season so far. The early season is mostly dominated by exports of lemons and grapefruit. Lemons are in demand and the lemon price also looks good," Ntshabele said.

"Also, we've exported 55% more grapefruit than last year at this point – although it is still very early in the season. The solid growth trajectory that the industry has been on has held so far, however, we anticipate that some serious threats will remain," he said.

Of significance for this season is the tariff turmoil that could disrupt the US market for some growers.

“It is imperative that a trade deal or exemption for seasonal fresh produce be agreed on by the governments of SA and the US before the paused 30% tariff comes into effect in two and a half months' time,” Ntshabele said.

Although the US represents only 4%-6% of SA's citrus exports, the US market is the lifeblood of Northern Cape and Western Cape rural towns, such as Citrusdal.

The figure for the expected 2025 citrus exports from SA has been calculated after the estimates for late mandarins were finalised recently. The late mandarin variety estimates show impressive growth, and the breakdown is as follows:

1. Leanri - 2.1m 15kg cartons, slightly down from 2.2m cartons in 2024
2. Orri - 2.1m 15kg cartons, the same as last year.
3. Nadorcott/Tango - 25.7m 15kg cartons, up significantly from 23.3m cartons compared to 2024, due to young trees coming into production
4. Other late mandarins - 3.2m 15kg cartons, up from 2.7m cartons in 2024.

These estimates come after the CGA released season estimates in March for lemons, oranges, grapefruit and early mandarins. Those figures represented stable growth overall as follows:

- Lemons at 32.9m 15kg cartons, a 5% decrease from 2024
- Navel oranges at 26.1m 15kg cartons, a 5% increase from 2024
- Valencia oranges at 52m 15kg cartons, a 6% increase from 2024
- Grapefruit at 13.5m 17kg cartons, also a 6% increase from 2024
- Satsuma (early mandarin) at 1.8m 15kg cartons, no change from the previous year
- Nova (early mandarin) at 4.5m, a 2% increase from 2024
- Clementines (early mandarin) at 5.4m 15kg cartons, a 10% increase from 2024

Ntshabele said the main challenges growers faced were logistical inefficiencies at ports, US tariff uncertainty, existing tariffs in other markets, and difficult access to markets like the European Union due to unnecessary phytosanitary (plant health) measures.

“We are cautiously optimistic that we will have a successful season and make progress in addressing the challenges our growers face,” he said.

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