

South African citrus exports to India triple to 30,000 tons

South African seedless citrus is making inroads into the Indian market, largely due to increasing demand for easy-peel varieties such as oranges and mandarins. Exporters and logistics providers are adopting innovative strategies to navigate regulatory and logistical challenges, ensuring the availability of citrus during India's off-season.

Industry sources note an increase in South African citrus exports to India, with volumes tripling from 10,000 tons in 2019 to 30,000 tons in 2024. While India is price-sensitive, its growing middle class and health-conscious population propel the demand for premium, seedless fruit rich in vitamin C.

South Africa's peak citrus season, from June to October, complements India's domestic production period of November to March. This seasonal contrast offers South Africa an advantageous market window, allowing it to avoid competition with Indian growers. Egypt, another major exporter, faces reduced competitiveness due to its overlapping season with India.

Trade barriers remain, with a 30% import duty inflating retail prices and discouraging bulk purchases by Indian importers. India's restriction on in-transit cold treatment—a measure for controlling fruit fly infestations—further complicates trade. This constraint necessitates fumigation on arrival, raising costs and risking quality.

Bilaterally, South African and Indian authorities are in discussions to harmonize phytosanitary measures, particularly cold treatment protocols. A pilot allowing in-transit cold treatment could mitigate costs and spoilage, aligning Indian standards with those in the EU and China.

Logistics providers are responding by investing in temperature-controlled supply chains, optimized customs solutions, and domestic distribution networks, enhancing speed to market once citrus reaches ports like Nhava Sheva and Chennai.

The Indian market shows a shift towards quality imported fruit, especially seedless citrus, influenced by urban centers like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru. Health-conscious consumers, grappling with extreme temperatures and pollution, perceive immune-boosting citrus as appealing.

Despite challenges, South African exporters maintain optimism about India, anticipating that citrus exports could surpass 50,000 tons in the coming years with supportive government actions and innovations in the supply chain.

This scenario presents an opportunity for logistics providers to develop agile networks and align with suppliers, ensuring freshness, cost-efficiency, and reliability in the Indo-African fresh produce corridor.

Source: Freight News (<https://www.freightnews.co.za/article/south-african-seedless-citrus-strengthens-foothold-india>)

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