

SA's citrus industry gears up for strong export season

By Jyothi Laldas | 27 May 2025 | 3:00 pm

South Africa's citrus industry is gearing up for another robust export season, with projections indicating a rise of 3,6% in export volumes to 171,1 million 15kg-equivalent cartons in 2025, up from last year's final tally of 164,5 million 15kg-equivalent cartons.



It is expected that South Africa's citrus exports will see an increase in volume of 3,6% to reach 171,1 million cartons.

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The season officially commenced in April, and is expected to run through to October.

According to the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), the 2025 season begun on a high note, driven by strong early performance in lemon and grapefruit exports.

"It's all systems go as the season starts," said Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the CGA, said in his latest newsletter.

"Lemons are in demand and the lemon price also looks good. We've exported 55% more grapefruit than last year at this point, although it is still very early in the season."

While the industry continues its upward trajectory, several critical challenges loom, however. Chief among them was uncertainty surrounding the US tariff structure, Ntshabele said.

He cautioned that the **paused 30% tariff** on South African citrus could come into effect in just over two months if no trade agreement or exemption for seasonal produce is reached between the South African and US governments.

"It is imperative that a trade deal or exemption for seasonal fresh produce be agreed on by the [respective] governments before the paused 30% tariff comes into effect.

"Although the US represents only 4% to 6% of South Africa's citrus exports, it is the lifeblood of Northern Cape and Western Cape rural towns," he warned.

The growth forecast for 2025 followed the CGA finalising its estimates for late mandarin varieties:

- Leanri: 2,1 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (slightly down from 2,2 million in 2024);
- Orri: 2,1 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (unchanged from 2024);
- Nadorcott/Tango: 25,7 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (up from 23,3 million in 2024);
- Other late mandarins: 3,2 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (up from 2,7 million in 2024).

The increase in Nadorcott and Tango mandarins is largely attributed to younger trees entering their productive phase.

Earlier seasonal estimates released by CGA in March projected steady gains across several citrus types:

- Lemons: 32,9 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (down from 34,63 million in 2024);
- Navel oranges: 26.1 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (up from 24,86 million in 2024);
- Valencia oranges: 52 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (up from 49 million in 2024);
- Grapefruit: 13,5 million 17kg-equivalent cartons (up from 12,73 million in 2024);
- Satsuma: 1,8 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (unchanged from 2024);
- Nova: 4,5 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (up from 4,41 million in 2024); and
- Clementines: 5,4 million 15kg-equivalent cartons (up from 4,9 million in 2024).

Ntshabele expressed cautious optimism for the months ahead.

"We [believe] that we will have a successful season and make progress in addressing the challenges our growers face," he said.

In a statement, Paul Hardman, COO at the CGA, stressed that the future success of the citrus sector hinges on resolving major challenges.

"These include logistical inefficiencies at ports, the looming US tariff uncertainty, existing tariffs on other markets, and restricted access to key regions like the European Union due to stringent phytosanitary measures."

Hardman added that if these issues are addressed, the citrus industry could further expand exports and contribute an additional 100 000 new jobs to South Africa's economy by 2032.

