

South African citrus exports benefit from improved port logistics

At the start of the 2025 citrus export season, logistics remained a major concern for growers, with port efficiency and container availability among the key challenges. As the season concludes, the industry reports improved movement of fruit through ports, particularly in Durban, following collaborative efforts between Transnet, shipping lines, and private logistics partners.

According to the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA), the 2025 season saw exports handled with minimal delays at major ports. This improvement follows coordinated actions across the logistics chain, involving growers, cold storage operators, shipping lines, and transport providers.



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Transnet Port Terminals increased throughput by investing in new equipment and revising its operational model. Incentives linked to productivity also contributed to greater efficiency. The number of 40-foot-equivalent containers shipped rose to

115,000, compared to 94,000 last year. Specialized reefer vessels moved 220,000 pallets, up from 200,000 in 2024.

The Port of Cape Town also supported increased volumes, particularly during the shortened U.S. shipping window ahead of the 30% tariff introduced in August. Shipping lines responded to a temporary shortage of refrigerated containers by increasing supply, ensuring continuity of exports.

Rail freight also showed improvement, with 1,254 containers transported long-distance compared to 1,064 last season. However, the sector continues to face technical and security challenges.

In the broader logistics context, the citrus industry has welcomed increased engagement between government and private partners. Transport Minister Barbara Creecy recently confirmed that eleven private operators have been awarded concessions across forty-one rail routes on six corridors for up to ten years. With nearly 40% of South Africa's citrus produced in Limpopo and transported roughly 850 km to Durban, expanded rail access is expected to support long-term efficiency.

The CGA also noted the recent court decision affirming the International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI) concession at the Port of Durban's Pier 2 Terminal as a key development for public-private partnerships. The organization expressed hope that the implementation of the ICTSI-Transnet agreement would proceed swiftly to support future export growth.

While the 2025 season recorded the highest citrus export volume to date, industry representatives emphasized that further investment and private participation in both rail and port infrastructure are needed to sustain growth.

Transnet's operational improvements mark progress in addressing long-standing logistical bottlenecks. Continued collaboration between the public and private sectors will be essential to support the citrus industry's expansion and employment targets in the years ahead.

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