South African citrus exports to U.S. drop on tariffs

Importers of South African citrus in the United States are scaling back volumes following a 30% tariff increase on fruit. This comes despite earlier expectations that large American distributors would absorb the impact of higher prices, according to Citrus Growers Association chair Gerrit van der Merwe, who spoke to Netwerk 24.

Speaking ahead of a meeting of agriculture ministers next week in preparation for the G20 Summit in Sandton in November, Van der Merwe, who is also managing director of ALG Estates in Citrusdal, estimated the volume impact of the "Trump tariffs" at about a third of last year's shipments to the United States.

In 2024, South Africa exported about one million cartons of citrus to the U.S. under duty-free terms provided by the African Growth and Opportunity Act. With the tariff hike now in place, exports are projected to decline to around 600,000 cartons of Midknight cultivar citrus. Mandarins are not included in this estimate. Van der Merwe noted that mandarins are cheaper for the United States to import from Chile and Peru, not only due to shorter distances but also because they face tariffs of only 10%.

Van der Merwe outlined possible implications for farming communities such as Citrusdal, which rely heavily on the seasonal export advantage to the U.S. market. Orchards established specifically for American consumers could be at risk. "Orchards planted specifically for the American consumers may have to be chopped down," he said. This would include ALG's orchards along the Olifants River and affect seasonal employment for about 500 workers.

While alternative markets exist, Van der Merwe said that developing them would take time, mainly due to the need to meet phytosanitary protocols.

Source: Freight News (https://www.freightnews.co.za/article/citrus-industry-already-counting-the-cost-of-trump-tariffs)

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