

2024 SA orchard registration results

The CGA 2024 Tree Census results present a comprehensive overview of the country's citrus industry.

By Precious Kunota

Notwithstanding the contributions of member growers from Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Eswatini to the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) Tree Census, this article focuses exclusively on South African data.

The latest CGA Tree Census figures indicate steady growth in the number of trees and hectares planted, alongside

a broadening varietal portfolio and a diverse regional distribution. These trends collectively underscore the continued dynamism and development of the citrus sector in SA.

The census data is derived from the annual online orchard registration process conducted in October and November, specifically for special export markets. The dataset includes

detailed information on varieties, rootstocks, tree age, and planted area in hectares. This information plays a vital role in informing grower decisions regarding varietal selection, guiding investment in packing and logistics infrastructure, and shaping priorities for market access and industry research. A consolidated



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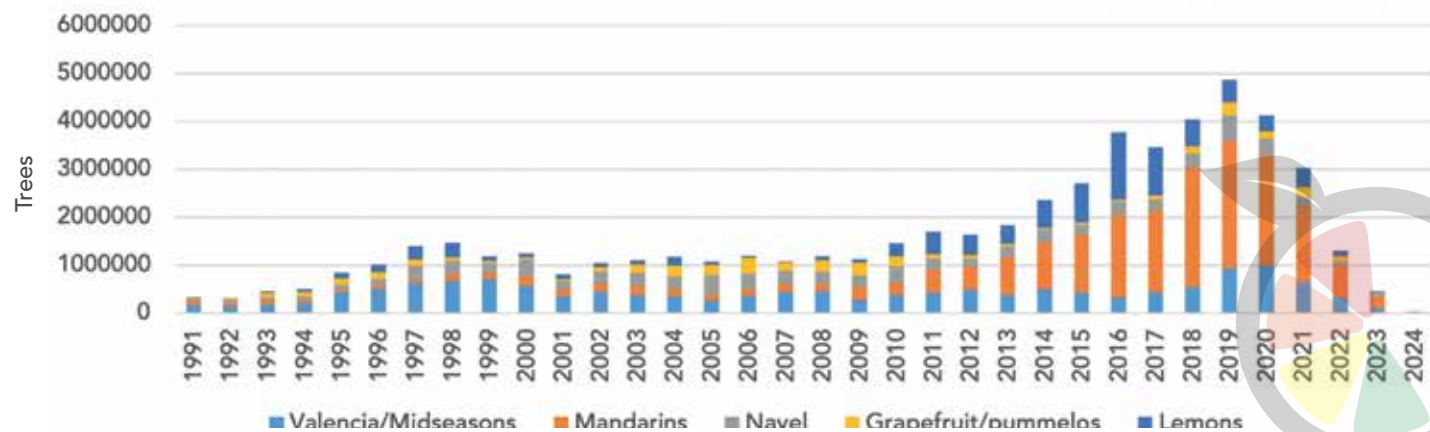


Figure 1: Number of annual citrus tree plantings

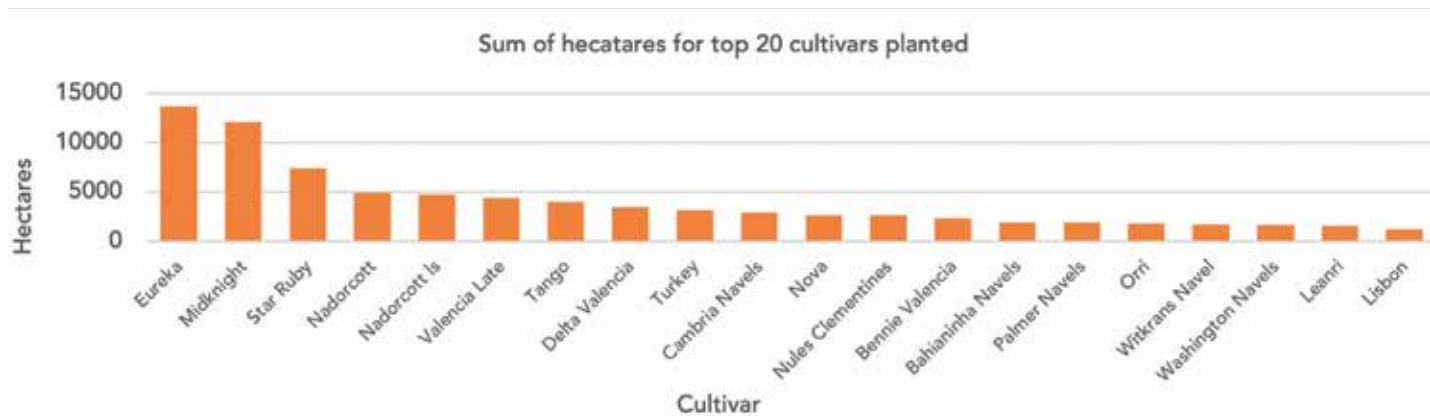


Figure 2: Top 20 planted cultivars hectares

Table 1: Hectares planted per citrus commodity

Age group	Valencia (ha)	Navel(ha)	Mandarins (ha)	Lemons (ha)	Grapefruit (ha)	Total (ha)	% of total
0-4yrs	1 923	578	3 077	1 126	713	7 418	8%
5-9yrs	5 937	2 919	14 692	7 484	1 476	32 507	33%
10-14yrs	4 441	1 884	5 453	5 028	599	17 406	18%
15-19yrs	3 616	2 329	1 293	908	2 488	10 633	11%
20yrs+	13 335	7 203	2 574	2 991	3 061	29 164	30%
Total	29 252	14 914	27 089	17 537	8 337	97 128	100%

Table 2: Hectares planted per province (2019-24)

Province	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2023 vs 2024 (ha)	2023 vs 2024 (%)
Limpopo	34 704	37 842	40 329	39 524	39 634	40 353	719	1,8%
Eastern Cape	21 249	24 648	25 217	24 508	24 681	25 154	473	1,9%
Western Cape	14 964	17 938	18 914	19 208	19 332	19 204	-128	-0,7%
Mpumalanga	6 367	7 639	7 877	8 127	7 443	7 571	128	1,7%
KwaZulu Natal	2 131	2 432	2 440	2 350	2 394	2 369	-25	-1,0%
Northern Cape	1 785	1 956	1 838	1 818	1 837	1 866	29	1,6%
North West	559	823	822	730	645	611	-34	-5,3%
Free State	13	13	12	12	12		-12	-100%
Grand total	81 772	93 289	97 450	96 277	95 977	97 128	1 151	1,2%

summary of this data is also published annually in the CGA Statistics Booklet.

Between 1991 and 2024, the citrus industry experienced exponential growth in the number of trees planted annually, with particularly notable acceleration over the past decade. As shown in Figure 1, the growth curve recently reached one of its lowest points, suggesting that the industry is entering a slow-down phase before the next expansion cycle. This trend reflects sustained reinvestment and long-term confidence in the sector. At commodity level, the past 10 years have seen a marked increase in mandarin and lemon plantings, signalling a shift in market demand and aligning with changing consumer preferences and export opportunities.

The 2024 Tree Census reports a total of 97 128 hectares of citrus planted in SA, reflecting a 1.2% increase compared to the previous census (Table 1). This modest growth is primarily attributed to an expansion in Valencia plantings,

corroborated by a corresponding rise in budwood sales during the same period.

Currently, 92% of citrus trees in SA are classified as bearing (five years and older), while the remaining 8% are non-bearing and fall within the 0–4-year age group. This distribution indicates potential for stable production growth in the near future as younger trees reach maturity. However, if the current planting rate remains unchanged, the industry may face a structural imbalance: over the next few years, the tree population will increasingly shift toward middle-aged and older cohorts, with insufficient young trees being planted to sustain long-term productivity. To maintain production stability, this trend will likely necessitate the initiation

of a new planting cycle.

At provincial level, Table 2 shows that Limpopo remains the largest citrus-producing region, accounting for 42% of the total planted area. It is followed by the Eastern Cape (26%) and the Western Cape (20%). The Western and Eastern Cape Provinces benefit from cooler climates conducive to the cultivation of navels, lemons, and mandarins, while the warmer climates of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu-Natal are better suited for grapefruit and Valencia oranges. Overall, the growth rate in planted area across provinces has remained relatively stagnant, with the Eastern Cape recording the highest increase at just 1.9%.

The Tree Census trends collectively underscore the continued dynamism and development of the citrus sector in SA.

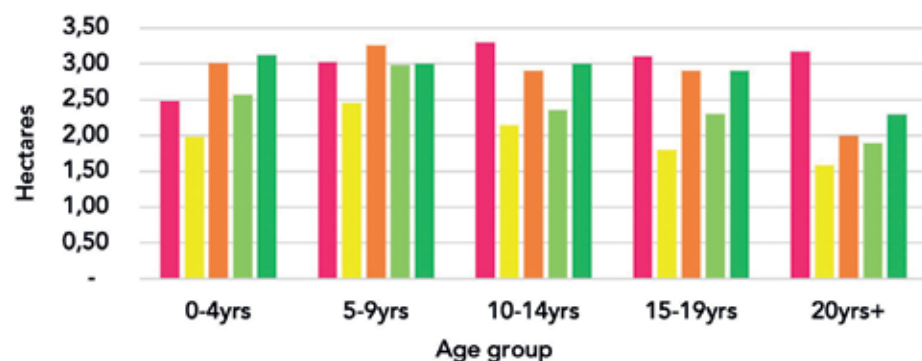
Census data plays a vital role in informing growers' decision-making.

Figure 2 presents the top 20 citrus cultivars by planted hectares, according to the Census. Leading the list are Eureka lemons, Midnight Valencias, Star Ruby grapefruits, and Nadorcott mandarins. The wide range of planted cultivars reflects the industry's adaptability and strategic alignment with evolving domestic and international consumer demand.

As for the age profile of citrus trees at commodity level, lemon and mandarin hectares are dominated by relatively young trees, with the majority being under 12 years old. This indicates strong potential for continued production growth in these categories over the coming years. Notably, lemons and mandarins currently have the smallest proportion of aging trees within the industry.

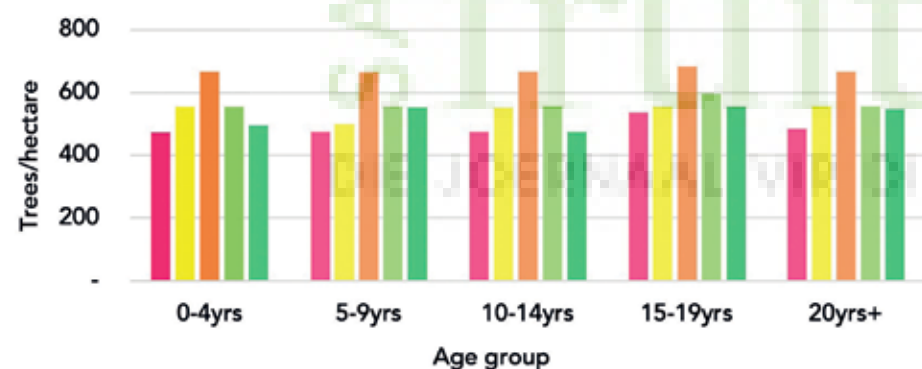
In contrast, the orange category – comprising both Valencias and Navels – shows a well-distributed age profile, with a healthy balance of young, mid-aged, and fewer aging trees. This distribution suggests a stable and sustained production output in the medium term. However, the Valencia category may experience renewed planting momentum if juicing demand continues to present a profitable market opportunity.

An analysis at the orchard level reveals variation in orchard size across different tree age groups. For lemons, newer orchards show an increase in median size, reaching approximately two hectares, while tree density has remained consistent at more or less 550/hectare. In contrast, orange orchards have maintained a stable median size of



■ Grapefruit/Pummelos ■ Lemons ■ Mandarins ■ Navel ■ Valencia/Midseason

Figure 3: The median orchard size per citrus type



■ Grapefruit/Pummelos ■ Lemons ■ Mandarins ■ Navel ■ Valencia/Midseason

Figure 4: The median tree density per orchard

approximately three hectares over the past 20 years, with tree density holding steady at about 530 trees/hectare – though a slight decline is observed in the 10–14-year age group.

Overall, the data indicate that planting styles have remained relatively consistent in terms of both orchard size and tree density across most citrus types. A notable exception is grapefruit, where recent plantings show a reduction in orchard size, although tree density has remained unchanged.

The 2024 Citrus Tree Census affirms the resilience and strategic expansion of SA's citrus industry. With strong growth in young orchards, diverse cultivar selection, and robust regional participation, the sector is well-positioned for sustained success and export competitiveness in years to come.

If the current planting rate remains unchanged, the industry may face a structural imbalance.



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