FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO (2/26)
Boitshoko Ntshabele, 9 January 2026

"Orange is the happiest colour." *– Frank Sinatra*

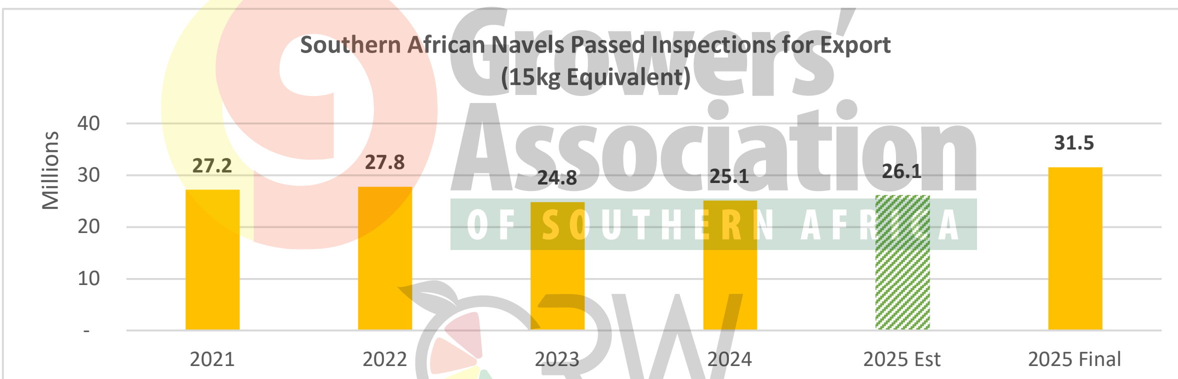
2025 Navel Season: A Tale of Unexpected Growth

This week's newsletter reflects on the 2025 navel orange season, with the grapefruit, lemon and mandarin seasons already discussed in previous editions.

Tracking the development of the navel crop is a critical mid-season activity. As the first major orange variety to be harvested, its performance provides early indicators of fruit quality, packout potential, and logistical pressures. Real-time adjustments to the initial estimate are vital for managing market expectations, adapting shipping schedules, and ensuring the supply chain can respond effectively to fluctuating volumes.

During the early-to-mid season, a mixed picture emerged from the various growing regions. Several challenges were met with countervailing positive indicators that hinted at a more complex season than originally forecast, with first estimates of 26.1 million cartons.

Summer rainfall areas encountered notable difficulties. Growers in Nelspruit and S-KZN struggled with low acid levels in the fruit, while Nelspruit also reported lower packouts due to wind blemishes, and S-KZN experienced hail damage. In Patensie the harvest was delayed by 10-14 days as growers waited for colour development. The Western Cape reported excellent fruit quality, which led to good packouts. This positive momentum soon overshadowed the early-season challenges, prompting a series of upward revisions to the navel projection as the harvest progressed.



The primary drivers behind the significant growth in final packed volumes are as follows:

- Higher-than-anticipated packout percentages were a consistent theme, particularly in the Sunday's River Valley and the Western Cape - the two leading regions.
- The impact of late navel varieties coming into production also contributed to the larger crop. Although the trend was seen early that SA would likely pack more than the estimate, the real increase was only from week 30 onwards with more volume packed per week and a longer season.
- In addition, many growers packed more Processing Grade (PP) fruit for export. The March estimate only took a 5% increase on PP fruit into account. This ended up being 9% of the total navel volume packed. The PP fruit volumes contributed significantly to the 21% variance between the initial forecast of 26.1 million cartons and final packed volumes of 31.5 million.

Europe remained the leading market, receiving 11.2 million cartons in 2025. Exports to the Middle East increased slightly, rising from 7.8 million to 8 million cartons. Shipments to Russia grew substantially, reaching 2.1 million cartons, up from 1 million the previous season.

The navel season thus concluded on a note of somewhat surprising abundance, setting a high-volume precedent that would continue into the Valencia season.