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SA citrus exports to India gain new treatment options

South African citrus exporters have gained additional market access options in India after nearly a decade of negotiations, with Indian authorities approving new cold-treatment protocols for fresh citrus.

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Source: Supplied | Javid Hashimov via Pexels

The additional treatment options are expected to give exporters greater logistical flexibility and could improve the quality of fruit reaching the Indian market.

Treatment options expand flexibility

South Africa already exports citrus to India using various treatments for fruit flies. The newly approved cold-treatment options provide exporters with additional choices when preparing fruit for the market.

Agriculture Minister Willie Aucamp welcomed the development, saying: "This is not only good news, but also indicates how advanced technology enable our farmers to push barriers to have other countries enjoy our high-quality produce."

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) said the development followed sustained technical engagement between South African and Indian authorities.

"Special recognition is given to the Department of Agriculture and Citrus Research International for their continued technical engagement with Indian authorities that have made the new treatment options possible. This demonstrates the importance of sustained public-private partnership in improving technical conditions for accessing markets," said Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the CGA.

India offers growth potential

With a population of approximately 1.47 billion and one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies, India represents significant potential for South African citrus exporters.

South Africa currently accounts for a small share of India's citrus imports, leaving room for growth. India's established citrus consumption, expanding middle class, increasing health-conscious consumption and growing demand for mandarin-type citrus are among the factors supporting the market opportunity.

South Africa's counter-seasonal production also allows its citrus industry to complement domestic supply in India.

Tariffs remain a barrier

While the new treatment options improve the technical conditions for market access, the CGA said commercial conditions remain a concern.

Most-Favoured-Nation tariffs of approximately 25–30% continue to place South African citrus at a disadvantage compared with Southern Hemisphere competitors that benefit from preferential tariff arrangements.

"We look forward to working with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition on the critical task of addressing these tariff barriers and improving the competitiveness of South African citrus in the Indian market going forward," said Ntshabele.

The CGA said positive developments in the SACU–India Preferential Trade Agreement process could help create improved preferential access to the Indian market.

It said combining improved phytosanitary market access with more competitive tariff conditions would be key to increasing South Africa's presence in India while supporting the long-term sustainability, growth and diversification of the citrus industry.