South Africa cuts 2026 orange export estimates by up to 19%

The 2026 season has become a challenging one for Southern African citrus growers. After a recent meeting of the Orange variety focus group, export estimates for Valencia and Navel Oranges were lowered to 58 million 15kg cartons and 24.3 million 15kg cartons, respectively, a reduction of some 8% and 19% from the opening season estimates. Members noted that further reductions will be made if current market conditions do not hold. The total citrus export estimate now stands at 197.9 million 15kg cartons, compared with the original April estimate of 209.4 million 15kg cartons.

"In a typical year, growers contend with one or two risk factors. However, this year nearly every element of the risk framework materialised negatively in some form. These include geopolitical shocks, severe weather events, disrupted market supply and demand patterns, exchange rate risk, as well as shipping and logistics challenges," said Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the CGA.

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The conflict in the Middle East has affected citrus exports, closing routes to markets that would ordinarily absorb a large share of the crop. South Africa usually exports around 20% of its crop to the Middle East. The conflict has also affected global purchasing power, particularly among middle-class households, while disruptions to empty container supplies have caused port congestion and increased shipping and logistics costs.

"South Africa's production volume this season remained consistent with the industry's long-term trajectory, as articulated in our Vision 260 strategy. And, although it cannot in itself account for all the disruptions experienced, it remains a significant volume of fruit that needs to pass efficiently through our ports, onto vessels and ultimately into markets within a distinct supply window. The war redirected fruit away from some of its usual destinations and into a narrower set of markets. We also saw a longer tail to the Northern hemisphere supply, causing our early arrivals to overlap to a greater extent than usual and leading to early saturation in some markets," explained CGA Chairperson Gerrit van der Merwe.

Severe rainfall in Limpopo and Mpumalanga was followed by flooding in the Western and Eastern Cape. Some Eastern Cape orchards were destroyed, contributing to lower export estimates and affecting fruit arrival quality in some cases.

South Africa's quality assurance and phytosanitary systems continue to manage these risks. "Founded on our growers' continued investment in scientific research, South Africa has world-class pest, disease and quality management protocols for both in-orchard and post-harvest treatments to help ensure that our fruit not only maintains its reputation for premium quality, but also meets all global phytosanitary requirements under the most strenuous of conditions," said Dr Ntshabele.

The CGA is supporting fruit flows through market intelligence and stakeholder engagement. The industry is focused on directing fruit to markets in a predictable manner.

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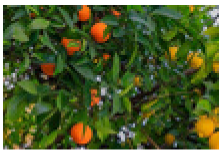

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