

South African citrus export estimate revised down

By Carla Espinoza Gutiérrez

The 2026 season is proving to be particularly complicated for South African citrus growers.



Following a recent meeting of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa ([CGA](#))'s Orange variety focus group, export estimates for Valencia and Navel oranges have been **lowered to 58 million and 24.3 million cartons**, respectively. This represents an **eight percent reduction for Valencias**, and a **19 percent cut for Navels**.

Total export estimates will be further reduced if current market conditions do not stabilize, the organization warned. Total export projection for the citrus season now sits at nearly 198 million, a **five percent decrease from the initial 209 million estimate** released in April.

CGA CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele noted that the present cycle has proven to be a **perfect storm of adverse conditions**.

"This year nearly every element of the risk framework materialized 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 Ntshabele.



According to the industry body, the **ongoing Middle East conflict has closed off routes to markets** that would ordinarily have absorbed around 20 percent of the country's citrus. This redirection is also affecting prices and is heavily impacting global consumer purchasing power, especially in middle-class households.

Tensions have also **disrupted the empty container supply, causing port congestion and driving up shipping and logistics costs**, further straining growers financially.

"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.

South African citrus production under strain

Sadly, logistical hurdles have been compounded by production woes. **Early rainfall** in key producing regions Limpopo and Mpumalanga was followed by flooding in the Western and the Eastern Cape, with **some orchards being completely destroyed**. This also negatively affected the quality of fruit upon arrival, the CGA stated.



The industry body is actively engaged in supporting and enabling shipment flow, supplying market intelligence, and sharing critical information in a timely manner through stakeholder engagement platforms.

"Yes, 2026 is tough, but South African citrus growers have proven their resilience many times before, having weathered remarkable challenges over the years. The industry remains on a sound trajectory, and an unusually challenging season does not change a fundamental truth: sustainable growth in exports and export markets can boost job creation and economically uplift rural communities across the country," Ntshabele stressed.

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