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Citrus export forecast cut by 5.5%

31 Aug 2026

Port delays and disrupted shipping routes are adding pressure to Southern Africa's citrus exporters. Source: Gala Rodriguez

Southern Africa's citrus export forecast has been reduced by about 5.5% as conflict in the Middle East, weaker markets, severe weather and port delays weigh on the season.

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has revised its forecast from an initial 209.4 million to 197.9 million 15kg cartons. This represents a reduction of 11.5 million cartons.

The 2026 season has been affected by several risks materialising at the same time, including disrupted trade routes, logistical bottlenecks and increased shipping and input costs, according to the association.

Routes to Middle Eastern markets that normally absorb about 20% of the citrus crop have been closed by conflict in the region, the CGA said.

The disruption has forced exporters to redirect fruit to fewer markets at a time when purchasing power has weakened in several key destinations.

Port delays have added to the pressure on an industry that must move large volumes of perishable fruit through the logistics system within a limited export window.

The season has also been affected by heavy rainfall in Limpopo and Mpumalanga and flooding in the Western and Eastern Cape. Some orchards were destroyed, according to the association.

Despite the lower forecast, citrus production remained on the industry's long-term growth trajectory, the CGA said.

The association warned that the increase in production placed a greater responsibility on the industry to manage risks affecting market access, logistics and biosecurity.

Improved access to international markets remained critical to the export-driven industry, while stronger farm biosecurity was needed to protect trade from pests and diseases, it said.

The CGA called for continued cooperation between the industry and government to address tariff and plant-health barriers affecting citrus exports.