

Southern African citrus industry forecasts export rise in 2018

Southern Africa is expecting to see a 7% year-on-year increase in citrus exports this season,



driven in part by a recovery in Navel orange volumes.

The Citrus Marketing Forum (CMF) estimates a total of 131.7 million 15-kilogram-cartons of citrus will be packed and passed for export, compared to 123 million last year. The figures relate to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

Citrus Growers Association of South Africa (CGA) CEO Justin Chadwick said general trends to be expected across most varieties for the season include good internal quality, normal sizing and good external appearance due to the warm and dry climatic conditions experienced during the summer months.

Grapefruit

Chadwick said a good grapefruit crop was expected, with exports estimated 8% up year-on-year at 14.8 million cartons. Pigmented varieties account for the bulk of the export with an expected 13.1 million-carton crop, while white grapefruit volumes are up 2% to 1.7 million cartons.

“For the bigger producing regions, Letsitele expects a medium to heavy crop, 14% up on last year’s to 4.3 million cartons, and normal fruit sizes,” he said.

“Hoedspruit expect a 7% increase over last year to 3.8 million cartons, recovering from their 2.4 million cartons drought and hail induced disaster in 2016. Limpopo River expect the same volume as last year with fruit size improving with late rains. Swaziland start select picking mid-March whilst Zimbabwe start in week 14, which is normal.”

Valencia

For Valencia oranges, export forecasts are almost unchanged from last year’s figure at 53.9 million cartons.

Chadwick said Letsitele, which accounts for almost a third of the volume, attributed their region’s 8% anticipated growth to 15.2 million cartons to good growing conditions and recovery from the drought.

“The second largest player, Sunday’s River Valley sees a recovery to seven million cartons in 2018 approaching 2015 levels after two years in the six million cartons range,” he said.

“Senwes’ production volume is the same at six million cartons, but quality is better. Nelspruit experienced hail damage and although they have normal sized production they expect 34% less exportable fruit to be packed this year. Western Cape volumes are 7% down on last year due to dry conditions whilst sizes are uncertain due to weather conditions.”

Navel

The estimated Navel export volume is set to return to normal from last year’s “disastrous” 21.1 million cartons with 25.58 million cartons expected in 2018. This is still 2% down on 2016’s volumes.

“It expected that future growth in this commodity will come from late maturing varieties with early maturing orchards being taken out. Senwes is the biggest exporting region showing 5% growth to 6.5 million cartons attributed to less hail damage this year,” he said.

“They had 100mm to 150mm less rain than last year so fruit is one size smaller and good internals are expected. Timing will be the same as last year. Sunday’s River Valley’s navel export crop recovers to 6 million cartons but fruit sizes may dull their export potential.

“Staying in the Eastern Cape, Patensie are 18% up on in comparison to last year’s poor season. The Western Cape at 6.2 million cartons are 17% up on last year, but dry conditions have tempered their recovery.”

Lemons

Lemon exports are set to approach the 21 million-cartons-mark as new orchards come into production, according to Chadwick.

“The 20.6 million cartons estimate is 8% up on last year’s final volume,” he said.

“Sunday’s River Valley expect to increase 4% on last year to 8.5 million cartons. Second-largest lemon-producing region Senwes continue their strong growth to 4.5 million cartons. Sizing is expected to be slightly smaller than last year.”

Soft citrus

As in the case of lemons, soft citrus’ upward trajectory continues. Overall growth of 10% to 14.75 million cartons is expected.

“Growth is driven by the late mandarin types, increasing 19% to 6.6 million cartons, whilst Satsumas (7%), Clementines (4%) and Novas (3%) show more modest gains,” Chadwick said.

“The Boland region expect a similar 3.3 million cartons to last year with the growth from new orchards coming on stream countered by the drought effects. Western Cape (2.6 million cartons) mandarins are around thirteen percent up. Nelspruit (2.2 million cartons) experienced a lot of hail damage, which hampered their growth.”

“The Eastern Cape Midlands (1.1 million cartons) expect good season with good sizes and excellent quality. Sunday’s River Valley (1.6 million cartons) show a general increase of thirteen percent with young trees coming into production.”

Patensie (2.6 million cartons and 24% growth) have new trees that are coming into production with Novas, late mandarins and even satsuma hectares on the increase.

“Overall, the soft citrus outlook is that of growth in volumes due to new plantings coming into production, being tempered somewhat with drought in key growing areas and packing generally expected to be a bit later across cultivars,” he said.

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