

2024 has been an unusual season for South African citrus

The Citrus Growers' Association's latest release from CEO Justin Chadwick highlights a challenging citrus season for South African growers. Despite high hopes, the industry faced several obstacles, resulting in lower-than-expected output.



Chadwick's statement begins by addressing the industry's mixed emotions, noting a sigh of relief but lingering questions about what "normal" looks like in the field.

"There were high hopes for a record season as the Variety Focus Groups (VFG) estimated a crop of just shy of 182 million cartons," he said. "Well ahead of the Vision 260 goal and a big increase over the 2023 final volume of 165 million cartons."

However, despite the VFG's typically accurate estimates, 2024 presented unforeseen challenges due to adverse weather, market complications, and rising processing costs.



Chadwick clarified that "the fruit was there, it just did not get into a carton destined for the overseas markets, and weather did play its role."

Hot, dry conditions during the summer of 2023 led to smaller fruit sizes, which can impact volume by as much as 10%. Additionally, the season saw two hundred-year floods within the year, a freeze in Senwes that wiped out millions of cartons, and strong winds in the Eastern Cape that led to fruit drop.

Market conditions also played a role, with northern hemisphere fruit still available at the start of South Africa's citrus season, forcing exporters to plan carefully.

According to Chadwick, the biggest factor affecting orange volumes was the elevated price for processing fruit. A crop failure in Brazil, coupled with already low juice stocks, drove up orange juice prices. Brazil, which produces up to 20 million tons of oranges annually, accounts for more than 70% of the world's orange juice.

The initially projected 24% volume decrease, announced in July, was later revised further.

The original estimate of nearly 181 million cartons has since been adjusted to 164.5 million cartons packed, down from 2023's total of 165.1 million cartons. Despite the decrease in packed fruit, 162.7 million cartons have been shipped, showing a slight increase from the previous season.

 Fresh Fruit Portal.com

