

## South African citrus season sees great quality amid logistic challenges

By Carla Espinoza Gutiérrez

With a season lasting approximately 28 weeks, the South African citrus industry is a driving force in the country's economy. However, logistic challenges could hinder exports this year, the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa ([CGA](#)) warned.



Citrus season usually starts with lemons and grapefruit in late March and continues until October when the final oranges are picked. July and August are normally the peak months.

Despite stronger demand anticipated for the 2023-24 campaign, inefficient port operations, and degrading transportation infrastructure remain a threat.

According to a Dec. 2023 [report](#) by the USDA, the Port of Cape Town has caused challenges to many exporting industries and received a ranking of 344 out of 347 in the 2022 World Bank Container Terminal Performance Index, while the Port of Durban ranked 341.

In particular, the Port of Cape Town experiences breakdowns in gantries used to load and unload ships, leading to increased congestion.

However, the sector remains hopeful as high volumes of exportable fruit and reduced shipping costs indicate potential for stronger growth.

The CEO of CGA, Justin Chadwick told [FreshFruitPortal.com](#) that the sector is looking at “excellent quality”, albeit “slightly smaller sizes” this season.

“What we are concerned about is port efficiency. Machine breakdowns have the potential to create bottlenecks at the ports. We are working closely with Transnet and TPT to keep the ports as efficient as possible during the busiest part of the season,” he said.

Transnet is one of the largest rail, port, and pipeline companies in South Africa, and is majorly owned by the government.

### Trade

Europe is the largest destination market for South African citrus, accounting for 33% of all shipments. The Middle East and Southeast Asia follow, with a 19% and 13% share, respectively.

“We are currently excited about getting more citrus to Asian markets. Especially India, Thailand, and South Korea show promise and are opportunities for our industry,” said Chadwick.

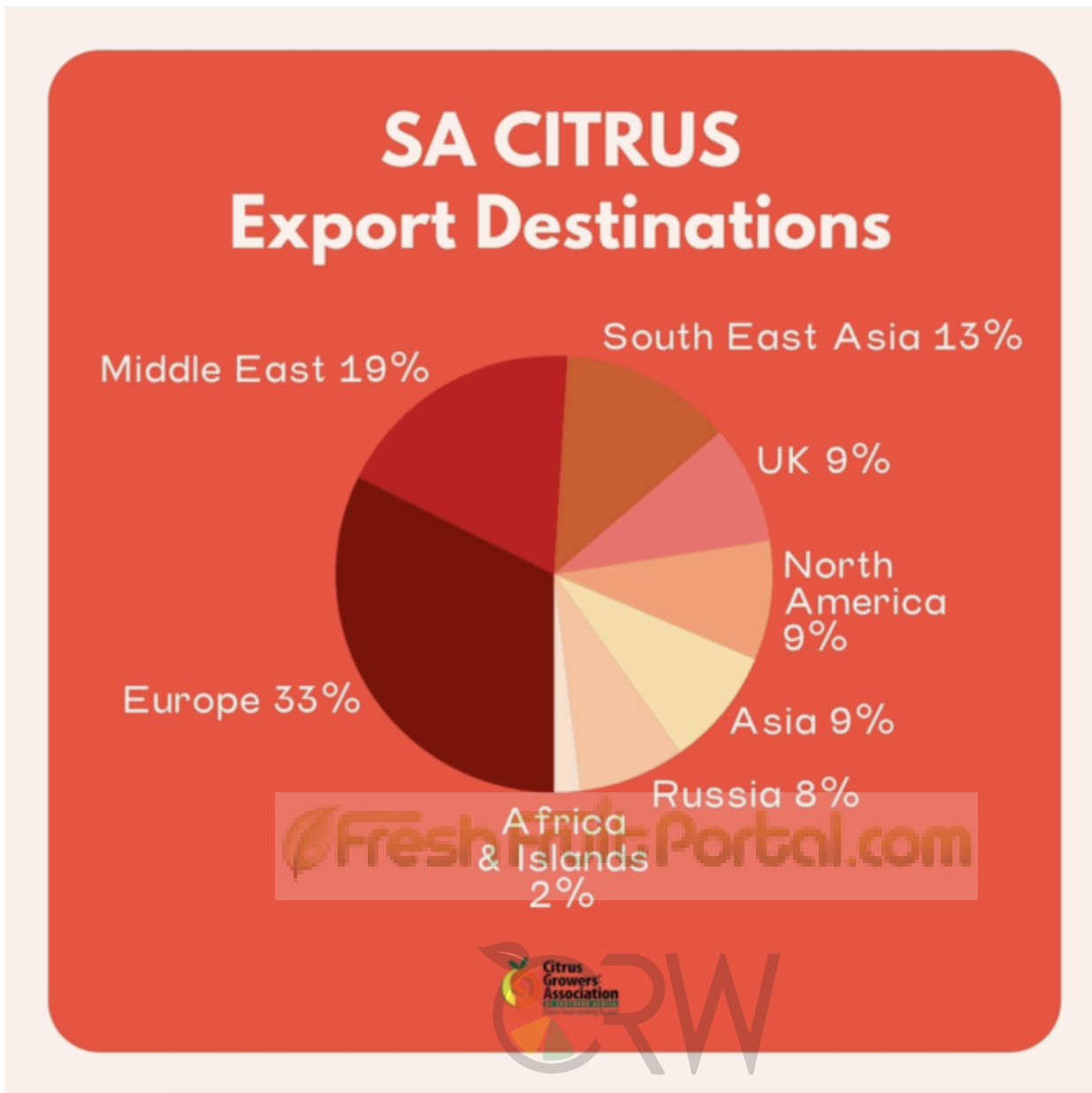


Chart courtesy of CGA.

As for new market openings, the executive said: "This year South Africa also established a new bilateral protocol, opening the Vietnamese market to South African oranges."

### Ongoing WTO dispute

The sector has encountered additional challenges in the ongoing dispute against the European Union's citrus regulations. In April, South Africa announced its second official consultation with the World Trade Organization (WTO) regarding the bloc's phytosanitary trade regulations for citrus.

An official release by the South African citrus industry announcing the consultation said the sector "cannot afford the almost 2 billion rands needed to comply with the EU's trade-restrictive regulations."

However, Spain's Citrus Management Committee (CGC) responded to the inquiry, calling it "threats and blackmail". The committee argues that the fruit is indeed a "scientifically proven means of contagion" and not a cosmetic problem as the South African citrus sector has assured.

"We feel confident about our case in front of the WTO," Chadwick said regarding the dispute.