

South African lemon exports to the Middle East continue at slower pace



© Carolize Jansen | FreshPlaza.com After two months of lemon exports, close to 4.5 million 15kg cartons have been inspected for shipping: in the north, lemon harvesting was frequently interrupted by rain, which, initially, seemed a slight blessing in disguise when the war first broke out. The current ceasefire is watched avidly by South African lemon exporters: the Middle East is vital to sell South Africa's early-season lemons.

Usually, the north aims to get its lemon shipments well away before the Eastern Cape lemon harvest starts, but this year, that hasn't entirely gone according to plan because of high rainfall and many overcast days.

Last year, by week 15, 60% of South Africa's lemons had been sent to the Middle East. It is a lemon-loving market where many counts can be accommodated, and which is not sensitive to the cosmetic blemishes caused by the citrus black spot fungus. "Growers in the CBS areas [summer rainfall citrus production regions] like to pick their orchards clean of fruit for the Middle East, and then those orchards are inspected for Europe," says a technical advisor in the citrus industry who asks not to be named. "This year, that has become more difficult."

Year-to-date figures show that 36% of the lemon crop has been directed towards the Middle East, with an uptick in exports of 10% to Europe, of 7% to Russia, and of 6% to the United Kingdom.

By week 15 last year, over 3 million cartons had been dispatched to the Middle East, compared to 1.6 million cartons this year, despite the war and the uncertainty around sea routes and the added logistical costs of circuitous routes.

A projected 10% increase in lemons available for exports further complicates the outlook for the season.

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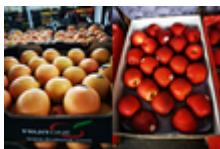
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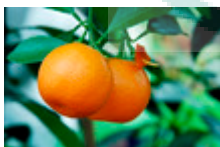
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