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SA citrus export estimate falls as season peaks

South Africa's citrus industry has revised its 2026 export forecast downward as weather disruptions, port congestion and global market pressures continue to affect production and exports. The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) now expects exports of 205.3 million 15kg cartons, down from its pre-season estimate of 209.4 million cartons.

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Source: NoName_13 via [Pixabay]

The latest estimate follows meetings of the CGA's variety focus groups, which revised forecasts across most citrus categories.

The mandarin export estimate declined by 2.7 million 15kg cartons, while the Navel orange estimate dropped by 4.6 million cartons. Growers have completed harvesting Nova and Leanri mandarins and are now packing later varieties, including Orri, Nadorcott and Tango.

Valencia orange estimates remain largely unchanged. Strong yields in northern production regions have offset smaller crops in the Eastern and Western Cape, while orange juice processors continue to absorb significant volumes of fruit. The Valencia harvest is expected to peak over the next two to three weeks.

The grapefruit export estimate declined by 1.7 million cartons, while the Lemon export estimate increased by 5.4 million cartons following a stronger-than-expected season.

Weather and logistics challenges

The industry has now reached the peak of its export season, placing additional pressure on port capacity, with delays reported at the Port of Durban.

Flooding in the Eastern and Western Cape, particularly in the Patensie region, disrupted the season, while rising input costs, difficult market conditions and pricing pressures continued to squeeze farm-gate margins, the CGA said.

Global pressures continue

Conflict in the Middle East has continued to disrupt one of South Africa's key citrus export markets, which traditionally receives about 20% of the country's citrus exports, the association said.

Higher shipping rates, increased diesel costs and longer transit times have added further pressure, while the potential spread of the conflict into the Red Sea and possible disruptions at the Port of Jeddah remain key concerns for exporters.

As export volumes peak, the CGA reiterated the importance of maintaining quality standards across the value chain to ensure the right fruit reaches the right market.