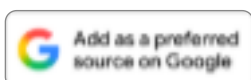


ECONOMY

India finally says yes to SA citrus after 10-year wait

New treatment options improve access but tariffs remain a barrier for growers

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Stella Mapenzauswa

Economics Editor



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India represents significant potential for South African citrus, but its share of the country's exports remains very small. Picture: (FREDLIN ADRIAAN)

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South Africa's citrus industry is cheering over a significant breakthrough, nearly 10 years in the making. India finally agreed to include additional treatment options for fresh citrus fruit from its fellow Brics member, potentially opening up a market of nearly 1.5-billion people.

The agreement announced on Monday is a step forward as the industry looks to grow its market in countries such as India and China and reduce its reliance on Europe, [which takes in about](#) 36% of South Africa's citrus but imposes what local producers call "unnecessary and unscientific plant health requirements". These include zero tolerance for pests such as [citrus black spot](#) and false codling moth, compulsory cold treatment and strict inspection and interception rules.

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), however, said it would continue to push for an improvement in the tariff conditions which still leave it at a disadvantage in the Indian market.

In a joint statement on Monday, the CGA and the department of agriculture said after nearly a decade of negotiations, India has now approved the inclusion of additional fruit fly cold treatment options, which would allow for improved quality of the product and add to logistical flexibility.

Agriculture minister Willie Aucamp hailed the development as indicative of how "advanced technology enables our farmers to push barriers to have other countries enjoy our high-quality produce".

With a population of about 1.47-billion and one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies, India represents significant potential for South African citrus. But its share of the country's exports remains very small, accounting for about 1.5% in 2024, [according to data](#) from the National Agricultural Marketing Council.

The breakthrough follows years of discussions between the department of agriculture, research and technical services organisation Citrus Research International and Indian authorities. It illustrates the importance of sustained public-private partnership in improving technical conditions for accessing markets, CGA CEO Boitshoko Ntshabele said.

But he added that the focus should now shift towards improving the commercial conditions under which South African citrus enters the Indian market. “Most-favoured-nation” tariffs of about 25%-30% continue to place local fruit at a disadvantage against southern hemisphere competitors benefiting from preferential tariff arrangements.

“We look forward to working with the department of trade, industry & competition on the critical task of addressing these tariff barriers and improving the competitiveness of South African citrus in the Indian market going forward,” Ntshabele said.

Citrus is South Africa’s leading agricultural export, accounting for 17% of the country’s \$15.1bn farm earnings in 2025 from external markets in the rest of Africa, Asia, the UK, the Middle East, the Black Sea, Europe and the Americas.

Critics have long questioned whether South Africa has seen any tangible benefits since joining Brics in 2010 — which at the time comprised Brazil, Russia, India and China.

They point out that its exports to fellow member states still comprise minerals, commodities and other relatively low-value products, while they bring in electronics, machinery, vehicles, refined petroleum products and fertilisers, among other finished products.

Research earlier this year showed the [trade deficit between South Africa and its Brics partners](#) had grown by \$9.6bn in the 14 years to 2024 since it became a member.

Chief agricultural economist at Agricultural Business Chamber (Agbiz), Wandile Sihlobo, who has flagged the difficulty South African farmers face in penetrating Brics markets, said India’s move is one in the right direction, “where Brics can be a more notable agricultural trade partner than before”.

“It has always been troubling to see that the Brics market accounted for fewer South African agricultural exports than the UK. Indeed, Brics is not yet a trade agreement but a political grouping,” Sihlobo wrote in a commentary.

“What India has done is ease the phytosanitary barriers. Such steps are necessary to increase agricultural exports, along with a reduction in tariffs.”

In May another Brics partner, China, implemented a zero-tariff policy until April 30 2028 for 20 more African countries, including South Africa, adding

them to the access it had granted to the continent's least-developed nations in 2024.

China is South Africa's largest single trading partner, although the latter mainly exports raw materials and commodities, with the new policy offering opportunities to add fruit, vegetables, wine and other agricultural products.

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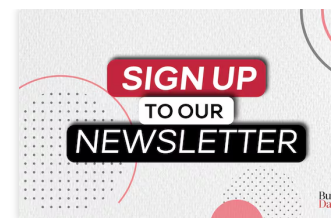


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