

Okkie Burger

Quality reduces Western Cape mandarin export crop

It has not been an easy citrus harvest, observes Okkie Burger, an independent citrus consultant with many years of experience in Citrusdal and the Boland, giving him a bird's-eye view of the province's citrus production challenges, of which there was no shortage.

"Many instances of Peteca spots developed on the lemons after packing, affecting the price and necessitating that fruit be re-sorted upon arrival," he says, observing that the industry loses a sizable portion of the crop each year to the largely unexplained phenomenon, and such fruit can only be sent for juicing.



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Peteca seems to be associated with heavy, waterlogged soils – as occurred during the excessive rains of May - and for that reason some areas are more prone to it than others.

20% reduction in mandarin crop

"Mandarin volumes on the trees were significantly down. It varied between areas, but on average the crop was lower by 20%, I reckon. Acid levels were a big challenge. Normally producers leave the fruit on the trees to allow colour to develop fully, but this year the acids fell so low that it put exports in jeopardy. Later in the season we also saw many instances of rind defects developing after packing, and this includes rind decay and pitting."



© Okkie BurgerThe Citrus Growers' Association has adjusted its original mandarin prediction of 52.7 million 15kg cartons to 49.3 million cartons.

And if that wasn't enough, he remarks, an unusual level of snail damage was apparent this season – fortunately only on mandarins.

Right: snail damage on mandarins

The dark cloud does, however, have a silver lining in the United States' renewal of the AGOA concession, allowing Western Cape citrus to enter the country duty-free, instead of with the 30% tariff as per the previous announcements of the US administration.

"After all the debates around the future of AGOA, it's a huge relief for us that duty-free access to the US is guaranteed for this season," Burger says.

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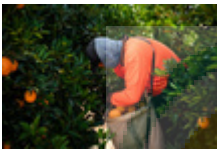
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