

South African citrus sector seeks U.S. market certainty after Agoa extension

South Africa's citrus sector has welcomed the extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa), while noting that longer-term access to the U.S. market remains uncertain because the country's eligibility is subject to review.

Jana Janse van Rensburg, market access liaison at the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA), said citrus is among South Africa's largest Agoa export products by value. The industry is calling for a bilateral trade arrangement with the U.S. alongside measures addressing tariff and phytosanitary requirements.

South African citrus exports currently face a 12.5% tariff. Despite this, Janse van Rensburg said exporters intend to continue supplying U.S. customers to maintain commercial relationships and shelf space.

"Our citrus production is growing, and exports will continue servicing U.S. buyers to retain shelf space and customer relationships, because these relationships can take years to build and are difficult to regain once lost," she said.

Export programs are planned months in advance, while fruit shipped to the U.S. requires specialised cold-chain infrastructure. Industry priorities include maintaining customer relationships, competitiveness, quality, sustainability, traceability, and cold-chain management.

South Africa exports citrus to more than 120 countries. The U.S. accounts for around 5% of total citrus exports, representing more than 120,000 tons from qualifying growing areas during the previous season.

"While diversification is essential, our success depends on both protecting access to established markets, such as the U.S., and securing growth in new ones," Janse van Rensburg said.

She added that diversification into new markets also involves phytosanitary, food safety, and maximum residue requirements.

Trade experts participating in the FairPlay webinar said businesses should assess export relationships market by market as tariffs and trade policies change. The citrus sector is seeking continued access to established destinations while developing alternative markets.

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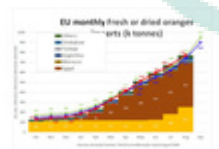
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