

Citrus estimates 2016 export season

South Africa: Grapefruit biggest casualty of hail and drought

Last week the Citrus Marketing Forum (CMF) of Southern Africa met in Johannesburg to consider the growers' estimate for expected Southern African citrus exports in 2016 and concluded that, despite the adverse effects of the drought and hail experienced in key producing areas, the industry was well positioned to meet its market demands.

It is expected that a total of 111.2 million cartons (15kg) of citrus will be packed and passed for export from citrus producers in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Swaziland in 2016. This is a decrease of six percent on the 2015 export crop. "General trends to be expected across most varieties for the season include excellent eating quality, smaller than average sizing and superior external appearance – all due to the warm and dry climatic conditions experienced during the past summer," said a spokesperson.

	2013	2014	2015	est 2016	% Change
VALENCIA	51.407.688	50.865.046	52.881.814	46.448.678	-12%
NAVELS	25.418.888	25.996.170	24.460.938	25.115.626	-6%
LEMONS	10.626.934	13.222.986	15.073.636	16.105.900	7%
SOFT CITRUS	8.442.205	9.957.944	9.988.211	11.156.821	12%
GRAPEFRUIT	16.088.016	13.798.122	14.219.720	10.911.711	-23%
Red G.F	14.261.870	12.246.276	12.829.919	9.779.943	-24%
White G.F	1.707.490	1.397.985	1.389.801	1.131.768	-19%

Figures are millions of 15 kg equivalent cartons for comparison purposes and includes volumes from Swaziland and Zimbabwe

Valencia Oranges

Growers estimate the Valencia orange crop to be down by twelve percent from the record 52.7m cartons in 2015, to 46.4m in 2016. The areas of Letsitele, Senwes and Hoedspruit, which jointly produce almost fifty percent of all Valencia oranges from Southern Africa, have all highlighted the drought and hail damage as the major contributing factors to the reduction in volume. However, at the time of publishing, late rain has arrived in most of the Northern growing areas, which will have a positive effect on the crop, especially in regard to fruit size.

Navel Oranges

The Navel orange crop is estimated to be up by just over two percent to 25.1m cartons. Although Senwes was badly affected by the drought and hail and expected to be down by fourteen percent, the Eastern Cape growing regions of Sundays River Valley and Patensie will be up by seven- and nine percent respectively, with the Western Cape also expected to be up by as much as fourteen percent.

Grapefruit

Grapefruit exports are expected to reach 12.4m cartons (15kg), down by twenty-three percent from 2015's record export. Drought in the Letsitele and Onderberg areas and severe hail damage in Hoedspruit are the major factors behind the drop in volume, exacerbated by the fact that 2016 was to be an "off" year anyway in terms of the production cycle. Although fruit size distribution will favour the smaller counts, Grapefruit growers have indicated that they will continue to support initiatives which aim to respect the demands of each of their markets in terms of timing, volume and specification.

Lemons

Lemon exports from Southern Africa are expected to continue its growth trend, with an increase of seven percent estimated for 2016, translating into a total volume of 16.1m cartons. Most of the growth can be ascribed to new plantings coming into production, particularly in the Sundays River Valley and Senwes areas.

Soft Citrus

With many new orchards coming into production in 2016 soft citrus growers are expecting their total exports to grow by twelve percent to 11.2m cartons. The season is predicted to offer good availability on the bigger sizes and excellent eating quality from all regions.

"Whilst the drought that has gripped large parts of the country has had a significant impact on the citrus export crop, it is clear that farmers prioritised their high value varieties with the limited water they have had available," said the spokesperson. "Some uncertainty as to the onward impact of the drought on the 2017 crop still exists, but with the arrival of late rain in the Northern areas and further evidence that the El Niño cycle has been broken, the picture looks far more positive now than a few weeks ago."

Against this backdrop, Southern African citrus growers are cautiously optimistic about the prospects for the 2016 season and their continued ability to supply citrus fruits of the highest quality to discerning markets around the globe.

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