

South Africa's drought has taken its toll on expected orange and grapefruit volumes this year, but growth is forecast for easy peelers and lemons.

Following the Citrus Marketing Forum (CMF) of Southern Africa which was held in Johannesburg last week, also incorporating Zimbabwe and Swaziland, the three countries' total export crop is set to be down 6% and 111.2 million (15kg equivalent) cartons.

"Drought in the northern citrus growing areas of Limpopo province and Mpumalanga has indeed resulted in lower estimates for grapefruit and Valencia oranges, with expectations of smaller sized fruit than normal," the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) of Southern Africa said in its weekly newsletter.

"The large Valencia orange and grapefruit producing region of Hoedspruit suffered the most with a massive hail storm adding to their drought woes.

"Their expected Valencia crop is down 36% from the 3.3 million cartons exported last year whilst their grapefruit crop is expected to be 42% lower."

On a more positive note however, the CGA believes quality will be excellent as dry conditions can lead to sweeter fruit.

"Grapefruit yields in the northern regions tend to be cyclical and the effects of the drought are exaggerated by this being an "off" year," the CGA said.

"However the grapefruit growers are confident they will be able to serve all the markets with the fruit available, although fruit may be half a count smaller.

"With oranges down seven percent, grapefruit down twenty three percent, lemons up seven percent and soft citrus up twelve percent the expectation is an overall six percent downturn in export volumes compared to last year, indicating a stable outlook and reason for growers and exporters to be cautiously optimistic."

The association also warned the real effects of the continued drought would only be seen in 2017.

In total the industry expects 46.4 million cartons of Valencias, 25.1 million cartons of Navels, 12.4 million cartons of grapefruit, 16.1 million cartons of lemons and 11.2 million cartons of easy peelers.

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