

In the Cape, brix levels are "brilliant" due to dry conditions

SA soft citrus growers pleased with strong global demand

Clementines and Novas, which have met with very strong demand and firm prices, are now making way for Orri, Nadorcotts and other late mandarin varieties.



The strong and warm winds that accompanied the good rain and snow two weeks ago in the Western Cape, have left its mark on citrus orchards. At Suiderland farms, spread across the Western Cape, an average of 2 to 5 tonnes of fruit per hectare were blown right off the trees, especially Nadorcotts because much of the Novas and clementines had already been harvested, says Japie Claassen, Suiderland's quality and technical manager. Trees also sustained wind damage.

In the Eastern Cape, Hannes de Waal of the Sundays River Citrus Company estimates burn damage to trees by the warm winds at roughly 20%.

Despite that, growers still report that volumes are up from last year and worldwide demand has been very strong for clementines and Novas. "It seems that this season everyone was looking for fruit," says Derek Sutton of Lona Fruit, which is sending its last Novas next week. Good volumes went to the Far East. "Strong demand for soft citrus is good because with the increased volume coming in, we have to look for markets all over."

Also in the Eastern Cape, citrus producer Habata has ended with Novas, but their attention is focused on their first large harvest of their new mandarin plantings. Valley Gold mandarins are starting this week, with the first picking of Nadorcott and Tango mandarins towards the end of the week as the first fruit start colouring (these varieties don't respond well to degreening and are therefore left to reach the desirable colour on the trees).



On Suiderland's farms, geographically spread across the Cape, Novas will still run until week 26 and clementines another two weeks maximum. "The sizing is one size smaller because of the drought, on average, although the drought is affecting the western areas more than our farms in the Swellendam area. However, the sugars are brilliant, because of the drought," Claassen says. "The European market segment has grown tremendously over the past few years, we'll probably send a bit more fruit there than to the UK."

Their production area in the Orange River region, Northern Cape, is already harvesting Nadorcotts which are sent to supermarket programmes where their clients manage the ClemenGold marketing. Claassen notes that the Chinese market prefers Novas for its firm skin and deep orange colour. Orri and Mor mandarins will start in week 28.

Orri volumes are on the increase in South Africa with young trees coming into full production; some growers regard it as the best-tasting mandarin out there with the drawback that its yield is lower than other varieties.

Last week the Orri harvest started in the Loskop Valley of Mpumalanga, with growers very satisfied with the sugar levels and the colour, for which the Loskop Valley is famous.

In Citrusdal the Orri is also doing "extremely well", according to Amo Mouton of Quattro Citrus, where the harvest is due to start in a week or so.

Joubert en Seuns in the Mpumalanga Lowveld have taken out their satsumas to focus on mandarins like Nadorcotts and Leanri, but the plantings are still young. Its first harvest of Nadorcotts, of volumes still too small for export, will start within two weeks.



More than six million 15kg cartons of soft citrus was packed at the end of week 23, of which 4.7 million has been shipped.

For more information:

Japie Claassens

Suiderland Plase

Tel: +27 21 945 1390

Email: japie@sland.co.za

<http://www.suiderlandplase.co.za/>

Derek Sutton

Lona Fruit

Tel: +27 21 481 8200

Email: dereks@lona.co.za

<http://www.lona.co.za/>

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Author: Carolize Jansen

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