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RSA citrus closes on landmark

South Africa's citrus export crop could well smash 150m cartons despite Covid-19 difficulties

South Africa's citrus industry continues to defy the odds in a most difficult export year, one that has seen Covid-19 set great challenges.

It now seems inevitable that the export figure may well reach the 150m carton mark, although the citrus industry officially predicted last week that exports will just fall short of this total.

The official figure released by the citrus growers' association body, CGA, now stands at 148.8m cartons, which is around 20m cartons more than last year's officially packed figure of 127.5m cartons. More than 128m cartons have been shipped so far this season.

A close analysis of the major categories shows that except for grapefruit, all have exceeded the pre-season estimate.

Grapefruit was around 1m cartons short of the estimate, but will still be higher than the volume shipped last year.

If the present predictions continue to be realised, soft citrus, lemons, navel oranges and Valencia oranges will all exceed expectations.

This year South African citrus orchards have clearly started to demonstrate an acceleration in production which has been forecast for some time.

The huge crop arrived during a season where Covid-19 initially threatened to disrupt exports, and in fact did make things extremely difficult for the industry. In the end, however, just about all other critical factors played out in favour of growers.

International demand led to European and other Northern Hemisphere production being cleared early, leaving the markets relatively empty for the South African crop.

Exchange rates could hardly have been more favourable and Covid-19 resulted in increased demand as consumers switched to traditional fruits which they associate with developing immunity in an effort to keep the virus at bay.

In short, despite coronavirus, South African citrus growers will conclude perhaps one of the best seasons in their history when the final curtain comes down at the end of the year.

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