

Strong demand for SA citrus at start of 2020 export season

By Siyanda Sishuba April 22, 2020 at 3:25 pm



South Africa's 2020 citrus export season has gotten off to a good start despite logistical challenges caused by the COVID-19 lockdowns in South Africa and in other countries. *Photo: FW Archive*

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A strong increase in global demand for citrus has so far been evident in the 2020 export season, according to Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa.

In a statement, Chadwick said increased global demand for lemons had resulted in 4,5 million 15kg-equivalent cartons being shipped to date. This was double the 1,8 million cartons exported during the same period in 2019.

"The bulk of these shipments (64%) have been shipped to the Middle East, while shipments to Russia have increased from 9% to 12% [of total volume]. [Volumes] of soft citrus, at 424 000 cartons to date, and grapefruit, at 411 000 cartons to date, are similar to the previous year's exports [for the same period]."

Gert Upton, marketing and sales representative at Schoonbee Landgoed, which produced citrus fruit among other commodities near Groblersdal in Limpopo, said countries in the Northern Hemisphere, such as Spain and Italy, had supplied lower volumes of citrus to the global market due to harvesting challenges.

"As a result of the coronavirus disease [COVID-19] pandemic lockdowns, there has seen a shortage of labourers, who mostly come from North African countries such as Morocco. Another reason for the increase [in demand] is the international drive for healthy foods to boost immune systems. Lemons fall in the category of Vitamin C products, which is an immune booster," said Upton.

“International countries are now [importing] more citrus supplies from South Africa and Argentina,” he added.

Chadwick said he was confident that the local citrus industry would be able to meet demand, and in March, export figures for Southern Africa reached a record 143,3 million cartons of citrus fruit.

“South African farmers also began harvesting lemons earlier (in April), as opposed to in May,” he said.

Upton added that in the Loskop Valley in Groblersdal, harvesting started two weeks earlier than usual.

However, challenges at some ports remained the biggest threat to the current citrus season, Chadwick said.

“Staff shortages and labour protests have affected operations at the Cape Town and Durban ports over the past few weeks. A back-up of non-essential containers that have not been moved or unpacked has also caused bottle-necks at ports,” he said

“These issues have been raised with Transnet management and the National Joint Command Centre, and we welcome the steps taken to increase staff capacity at all ports, as well as recent amendments to the Disaster Management Act regulations to allow for the movement of both essential and non-essential cargo at ports,” he added.

