

South Africa targets 200m citrus cartons

The country's citrus export volume could rise to 200m cartons in the next five years

South Africa's citrus industry is still in celebratory mood over its performance in 2020 as it gets down to the serious business of dealing with the 2021 export season.

As it is doing so, the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) has said that there is no reason why the country will not hit the 200m carton mark in five years' time. This would mean an increase of more than 50m cartons in five years.

The CGA announced this week that its final export crop did in fact reach 146m cartons in 2020, as was predicted in December.

Aside from a greatly successful season, what is emerging now is that the steep growth in production is likely to continue in the future.

For the record, South Africa exported 146m cartons, up 3m cartons from the original estimate and almost 10m cartons or around 13 per cent more than the 2019 volume of 127.5m cartons.

That this was achieved in a year during which the effects of Covid-19 were experienced across South Africa is remarkable.

It is not only citrus which recorded this success – the South African apple and pear industry and the avocado industry also achieved similar margins of success despite dealing with the full impact of Covid-19 in their marketing seasons.

In announcing the figures, the CGA said it indicated phenomenal growth within the South African citrus industry, which remained the second largest exporter of fresh citrus in the world after Spain.

"This achievement is the result of close collaborations and partnerships within the industry and with government, and is testament to the quality of South African citrus fruit which is in demand all over the globe."

This is, however, not the end of the story. While the South African economy is generally in serious decline as a result of the pandemic, the CGA now predicts that exports will grow by another 300,000 tonnes over the next three years.

"The growth projections for soft citrus, lemons and Valencia oranges alone indicate an expected additional R6.8bn in foreign exchange earnings and the creation of 22,250 sustainable jobs over the next three years," the organisation stated.

The CGA's recent tree census, which is based on data collected at the end of 2020, showed that the area planted with citrus in Southern Africa had increased significantly. Planted area increased by 8.4 per cent from 88,569ha, to 96,031ha.

"This is excellent news for the citrus industry and for South Africa as we start to emerge from the devastation of Covid-19," said CEO Justin Chadwick. "We are looking forward to playing our part in rebuilding the economy and putting South Africa back on a strong financial footing."

The CGA said it would be working with all stakeholders and partners in government to open more international doors for South African fruit.

"If we can continue to gain and expand access in key markets such as the European Union, the United States, China and India, there is no reason why South Africa will not meet long-term industry projections to export 200m cartons of citrus fruit within the next five years."

It is expected that the first new season fruit for 2021 will be harvested by the end of February. However, it is unlikely that the first CGA estimate will be available before mid-March.

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