EXPORT ESTIMATES OF CITRUS VARIETIES SHOW STABILITY AND BALANCED GROWTH

Media statement by Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA)

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Ahead of the official start of the 2025 citrus export season in April, the variety focus groups of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) presented their predicted volumes available for export in the upcoming season. "All available data project exports that are in line with the five-year average, which means there will be sufficient fruit for our global markets. The outlook suggests no oversupply or undersupply," said Gerrit van der Merwe, Chairman of the CGA.

Overall, the quality of the fruit for 2025 looks to be excellent. The breakdown of various variety estimates indicates a balanced season ahead.

The current prediction is that 32.9 million 15kg cartons of Lemons will be exported to key markets, which represents a 5% decrease from last year. Estimates for citrus-producing regions the Sundays River Valley, Senwes (Marble Hall and Groblersdal), Boland and Patensie are all down, but Hoedspruit is estimated to increase its lemon production. Early lemons have already started to be sent to overseas markets, especially to the Middle East, Russia and Canada.

Figures for Navel and Valencia oranges are expected to be up this year.

Predictions show a 5% increase in export volume for Navel oranges, at 26.1 million 15kg cartons available for packing. The Orange focus group has, for the first time, split estimates into Early/Mid Navels (11.34 million cartons) and Late Navels (14.75 million cartons) to improve tracking. Last year unusual weather events such as floods in the Western Cape and frost in Limpopo affected Navel exports, but, weather-permitting, volumes are expected to improve in 2025.

After four years of slight declines in Valencia orange figures, exports are likely to improve in 2025. An increase on 2024 figures of 6% to 52 million 15kg cartons is projected. The possible impact of juicing prices on this figure is not yet quantifiable. Last year unusually high local processing prices supressed exports of Valencia oranges.

Grapefruit exports are also predicted to increase. The 6% growth figure translates into 13.5 million 17kg cartons. The peak period for Grapefruit exports is expected to be between middle April and middle May. The Grapefruit focus group is also embarking on a new marketing project this season, aiming to drive an increase in Grapefruit consumption amongst a younger target audience in the European market.

Two early mandarin varieties show stability in supply. The Satsuma season is likely to again, as in 2024, close around the 1.8 million 15kg cartons mark. The Nova season shows a slight 2% decrease to 4.5 million 15kg cartons. The third early mandarin variety, Clementines, presents a solid increase of 10%, with exports expected to increase to 5.4 million 15kg cartons.

The estimates for late mandarin varieties will only be made next month when more accurate production data is available. Meetings of all the variety focus groups are also held on a regular basis during the season to track and update estimates if needed.

Long-term projections still show that, if all role-players work together to address challenges, the industry can reach its target of exporting 260 million cartons by 2032, and in the process create 100 000 new jobs. Two of the largest challenges to achieve this target remain deficient rail and port logistics and the European Union's unnecessary phytosanitary (plant health) measures regarding Citrus Black Spot (CBS) and False Coddling Moth (FCM).

"The CGA is grateful for progress made by Transnet in terms of equipment acquisitions at ports, but the only long-term way to achieve the needed efficiency is through the structural change that only Public Sector Participation can bring," said Mitchell Brooke, the CGA's Logistics Development Manager. A recent study by the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) that found the total cost of inefficient logistics to the citrus industry amounted to R5.27 billion per year.

The EU's trade restrictive and unscientific measures on CBS and FCM are the focus of two historic cases at the World Trade Organisation's trade dispute body. "We hope for swift progress on the cases, but disputes like these take time. We remain optimistic for the issue to be finalised before the 2026 season. Every season the measures cost SA's growers no less than R3.7 billion, keeping especially emerging growers out of the EU market," said Justin Chadwick, outgoing CEO of the CGA.

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