

CITRUS

Citrus production outlook optimistic despite drought

In spite of the adverse effects that the drought and hail have had on important citrus-producing areas, the industry is well-positioned to meet its export demands.

John Edmonds, information manager at the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA), said that a total of 111,2 million, 15kg cartons of citrus were expected to be packed and exported from citrus producers in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Swaziland this year. This was, however, a decrease of 6% on the 2015 export crop.

"Growers estimate the Valencia orange crop to be down by 12% from the record 52,7 million cartons in 2015, to 46,4 million cartons in 2016. Production in the Letsitele area was down 18%, Senwes was down 21% and Hoedspruit was down 36%. Together, citrus farmers in these areas produce almost 50% of all Valencia oranges in South Africa. [The] drought and hail damage a[re] [thus] the major contributing

factors [in] the reduction [of] volume," Edmonds said.

The navel orange crop was estimated to increase by almost 3% to 25,1 million cartons, he added.

"The Eastern Cape growing regions of Sundays River Valley and Patensie [are] up by 7% and 9% respectively, with the Western Cape also expected to be up by as much as 14%."

Edmonds said that lemon exports were anticipated to increase by 7% to 16,1 million cartons.

"Most of [this] growth can be ascribed to new plantings coming into production in the Sundays River Valley, which was up by 13%," he said.

He added that because many new soft citrus orchards were coming into production in 2016, soft citrus growers were expecting their total exports to grow by 12% to 11,2 million cartons, with the Western Cape and Boland regions

contributing a combined 45% of the total volume.

Satsumas were expected to increase 4% to 1,8 million cartons, while Clementine exports were expected to increase 10% to 2,7 million cartons. Mandarin variety exports were anticipated to increase 15% to 6,6 million cartons.

"Farmers in the northern parts of the country prioritised their high-value varieties with the limited water they've had available during [the] drought season. The arrival of late rains also improved prospects for some varieties to size up and become more suitable for export, as well as alleviating some of the concern for the 2017 crop," he said.

Due to the warm, dry summer conditions, most varieties for the season demonstrated excellent eating quality and superior external appearance. But fruit size was smaller than the average produced in 2015. – *Siyanda Sishuba*

GRAPEFRUIT

SA grapefruit in high demand in China

There was a growing demand for South Africa's grapefruit in China, according to Jason Bosch, managing director at fruit trading company Origin Fruit Direct Asia. Bosch said that five years ago, the company had exported 50 000 cartons of grapefruit to China, the world's 7th biggest importer of fruit, and this figure had now increased to 1,7 million cartons.

"Promotional activities of South African grapefruit have resulted in more consumers becoming interested in grapefruit, particularly the younger generation," Bosch said.

He said grapefruit exports had also exceeded local consumption. "In South Africa, the market isn't experiencing the same growth because we simply don't have the demand for grapefruit."

John Edmonds, information manager at the Citrus Growers' Association, said that although South Africa had access to the Chinese market, its non-tariff trade terms were particularly stringent. All fruit bought by China had to undergo cold sterilisation treatment before being shipped. This was to ensure that no fruit with the common citrus pest, false codling moth, was exported.

"The South African government is working on negotiating better terms of trade for South Africa's fruit to China," Edmonds added.

In the past, Japan had imported large volumes of South Africa's grapefruit, but this market had declined. "Japan is a shrinking market for grapefruit because

consumers who traditionally ate the fruit are ageing and passing away," Edmonds said. Younger generation consumers had different taste preferences, and preferred seedless fruit that was easier to eat and peel.

However, Edmonds said consumer preferences could change. "Over time, promotional activities [of fruit] can change market perceptions," he said.

Many consumers considered grapefruit a luxury item, and this affected sales volumes. Nonetheless, the fruit had gained popularity for its health benefits, and this had created demand. The grapefruit industry was also driven by seasonal consumption, and demand was higher during winter because of the fruit's high Vitamin C content. – *Wilma den Hartigh*