

SA citrus exports surge 22% in 2025, setting new record

South Africa's citrus sector has delivered a record export season in 2025, packing 203.4 million 15kg cartons for international markets. This represents a 22% increase from 2024 and exceeds the industry's April estimate of 171.2 million cartons.



Source: [NbName_13](#) via [Pixabay](#)

The growth is attributed to a combination of favourable weather, young trees reaching maturity, and improved logistics efficiency, alongside high overseas demand for juicing oranges and lemons and an early end to Northern Hemisphere supply, which extended South Africa's selling window.

Logistics and production efficiency key to success

According to Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele, CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), "Improved logistics efficiency, especially port efficiency, was achieved by Transnet, largely through investments in new equipment and the introduction of employee incentives linked to productivity. There was a high level of effective co-operation by all logistics players, including shipping lines, resulting in a product logistics eco-system."

At the farm level, enhanced water use, improved pest management, and increased hectares under nets contributed to exceptional pack-outs and fruit quality.

Vision 260 and long-term industry growth

The 2025 results sit slightly ahead of CGA's Vision 260 growth strategy, which aims to produce and export 260 million cartons by 2032, potentially creating 100,000 new jobs and generating substantial foreign currency for South Africa.

Dr Ntshabele noted that despite strong volumes, challenges remain: "Our growers continue to face unpredictable price and market dynamics, rising input costs, as well as market access issues such as high tariffs and unscientific plant health measures."

Tariffs and global market access

A 30% tariff imposed by the United States had a limited impact this season, as it came into effect at the end of the local export period. Western and Northern Cape growers expedited shipments ahead of the deadline.

Dr Ntshabele cautioned: "We remain very worried about the impact of the 30% tariff on the coming 2026 season. That is why a mutually beneficial trade deal between the United States and South Africa must be finalised urgently." He added that exemptions for citrus, or all seasonal fresh produce, could prevent unnecessary price inflation in the US market.

Gerrit van der Merwe, chairperson of CGA, highlighted broader growth potential: "It is imperative that the government actively pursues improved market access in China, India, Japan, South Korea, the European Union, and the United States. These markets represent real growth opportunities for South African citrus, which is globally recognised for its quality and taste."

2025 citrus export figures by variety

- Grapefruit: 15.3 million cartons, 7% increase from 2024.
- Mandarins: 53.5 million cartons, 28% increase from 2024.
- Lemons: 41.3 million cartons, 19% increase from 2024.
- Navel Oranges: 31.5 million cartons, 25% increase from 2024.
- Valencia Oranges: 61.8 million cartons, up from 48.7 million in 2024.

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