

South African citrus farmers pivot to juice market amid export challenges

South African citrus farmers have encountered a challenging export season, marked by export bottlenecks and adverse weather conditions, leading to reduced production. In response, many have pivoted to the local juice market, benefitting from elevated juice prices. The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa's CEO, Justin Chadwick, highlighted that each of the country's three main export corridors faced unique difficulties, impacting the efficiency of citrus exports. The Northern Regions Corridor, utilizing the ports of Maputo and Durban, experienced equipment issues, while the Eastern Cape Corridor faced wind disruptions. Despite these challenges, specialized reefer shipping remained steady, and an increase in reefer plug capacity at ports was noted as a positive development.

Adverse weather conditions, including heatwaves and floods, alongside frost in July, affected fruit quality and size, leading to a decrease in export volumes. Nonetheless, the high demand and favorable prices in the juice market provided a viable alternative for farmers, with local juice prices reaching up to R6 per kilo. This shift to juicing was largely risk-free and offered good returns, making it an attractive option for many growers. The global and local orange juice market prices were bolstered by El Niño conditions and citrus greening in Brazil, ensuring sustained high prices and supporting positive on-farm margins. However, late-season black frost further impacted yields, particularly in the northern regions, with overall citrus volumes reported to be down by approximately 30%.

Source: foodformzansi (<https://www.foodformzansi.co.za/citrus-farmers-profit-from-juice-market-amid-export-challenges/>)

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