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Zimbabwe's citrus growers test Beira for exports

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Zimbabwean citrus growers will ship exports destined for countries in the Middle East and the Far East through Mozambique's port of Beira, although their exports to China will still go through Durban.

The farmers have embarked on trial shipments of thirty containers of lemons from Chegutu, Mashonaland West, and Mazowe in Central Mashonaland, that will be shipped from Mozambique's second-largest port in April, followed by another 30 in May. Sixty containers of oranges, mainly from Mazowe, will be exported in June.

Fresh Plaza reports that farmers at Beitbridge on the border of South Africa will join the trial, sending to Beira 70% of the 500 containers of oranges planned for export for the period, avoiding Durban during its peak citrus flow. The other 30% will comprise oranges from Mazowe.

The Zimbabwean Horticultural Development Council of Zimbabwe (HDCZ) and the Citrus Growers Association of Zimbabwe are currently discussing the trial with several shipping lines.

HDCZ CEO, Linda Nielsen, said Beira was a well-run port and growers were “cautiously optimistic” about the trial run.

The World Bank ranked the Port of Beira, the final point in the Beira Corridor, as the best-performing port in Southern Africa. The port also links the minerals mined in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Indian Ocean.

Cornelder de Moçambique, part of the Dutch company Cornelder Holdings, has been the concessionaire of the cargo and container terminals in the Port of Beira for more than twenty years.

“Beira has come a long way over the past few years. In future we’ll also be looking at other sectors to go through there as well. Citrus is more ready than the others,” Nielsen said.

She said landside costing and export processes from Beitbridge to Beira would be tested this season, to determine the viability of the port route, before ramping up volumes.

“It is hoped that there will be trucks returning to Beira that would normally be empty, that will be able to take citrus to bring down the cost,” Nielsen said.

She said challenges at the Port of Durban during the last blueberry season had delayed Zimbabwean exports by three weeks, impacting growers’ thin marketing window to beat Peru in Europe.

“Blueberries need controlled atmosphere, so we’ll be looking to encourage investment into cold storage facilities at Beira if it works.”

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