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## Citrus industry in good-times mode

📅 June 24, 2016 👤 Riaan Marais

The Eastern Cape citrus industry is enjoying a fruitful period, and will continue to do so if South Africa maintains its competitive edge.

But an analyst and industry figures have warned that there are long-term challenges ahead as several countries around the world, such as Spain, are hoping to move into the export citrus market in Europe and Asia where South Africa is strong.

At the moment, though, prospects for the industry were positive, Absa-Agribusiness economist Wessel Lemmer said.

"In fact, the expectation is that citrus exports could grow to 130 million cartons within five years," Lemmer said in an article for farming website Landbou. "And if that happens it could go to 150 million cartons within the next 10 to 15 years," he said.

While the drought had caused a decline in citrus exports over the last year (from 118 million cartons to 111 million cartons), the impact had been limited as more than 40% of the country's citrus was produced in the Eastern and Western Cape, regions not as badly affected by the drought as others had been.

Another positive was that, in his recent budget vote speech, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Senzeni Zokwana had said citrus, among other agricultural commodities, had gained access

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to the Indonesian market, with exporters allowed to use the Port of Jakarta.

But Lemmer said that while South Africa dominated citrus exports in the Southern Hemisphere, the government still RAND/POUND GOLD PLATINUM needed to develop strategies to stay ahead of competitors who had set their sights on export markets like Europe and Asia.

“South Africa needs to invest in the capacity of the government structures needed to negotiate lower import tariffs, which would make trade cheaper,” he said.

“The government also needs people to fight against the constant campaigning about black spot on South African fruit in Europe – a political game countries like Spain are playing to limit South African fruit export.”

Citrus Growers’ Association (CGA) industry affairs manager Paul Hardman said the organisation was always concerned about outside competitors.

“We are working closely with the government to keep markets open and to stimulate growth,” Hardman said.

“We are very competitive in the international market, provided markets remain open.”

In addition, the association and the government were developing the Phytclean project – an electronic system to streamline citrus registration processes and simplify the export certification process.

“Just by streamlining certain processes through Phytclean, the fruit industry could save up to R230-million over the next five years,” Hardman said.

Meanwhile, Agri Eastern Cape president Doug Stern said after a visit to the citrus farming region around Humansdorp last week that farmers had nothing but a positive outlook on the industry and its future development.

Stern also said a lot of attention was being given to developing farmers while the industry was doing well to ensure they continued to do so.

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