

RSA citrus exports "lower than predicted"

Volumes could be as much as 9 per cent lower than the previous year

South Africa has been predicting a smaller citrus export crop from the beginning of the season, but it has now become apparent that volumes may drop further than predicted – a nine per cent reduction compared with last year.

The latest prediction places the estimated export crop at 108.5m cartons, down from earlier predictions of 111.2m. Last year South Africa exported 118.3m cartons, which makes this year's export crop the smallest in three years.

Citrus sources say the early soft citrus season is all but over. The estimate has been increased somewhat because of the experience with Satsumas and Clementines, which came in above predictions. At the same time the late mandarin estimate has decreased. The early soft citrus volumes increased on the back of vibrant markets.

The Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) says Southern Hemisphere soft citrus shipments to date have increased to the Far East, the EU (excluding UK) and North America. They decreased to Russia and the UK and remained steady to Middle East. "

The growth to the Far East and EU is driven by increases from South Africa; while increased volumes to North America is the result of increased shipments from Chile. Argentinean volumes to Russia have dropped significantly, while the decrease to the UK is largely due to reduced South African shipments," the group noted. The CGA says this supply pattern could change as exports enter the late mandarin season.

Meanwhile, grapefruit and lemons are hot property, with exporters saying they have to commit to record prices before growers would allocate fruit to them.

"It will be a great season for lemon and grapefruit growers," says Jason Bosch of Origin Direct. He says while growers with a full crop will have a bumper season, there are areas where producers would suffer because of hail damage and drought.

Increased demand for grapefruit in China and Korea is also having an effect on supplies to more traditional markets in the East. "In a short crop season, it is to be expected that Japan will not see its traditional volume this year, with China taking increased volumes."

As far as Navels are concerned, the crop is expected to drop from 25.1m cartons earlier estimated to 22.5m cartons. The latest feedback and regional projections point to an early finish to the Navel season after early, high-tempo packing. This is 10.5 per cent lower than originally estimated and 8 per cent less than 2015 volumes.

EUROFRUIT

