

South Africa is expecting citrus exports in 2021 to set another consecutive record, driven in large part by late mandarins.

The Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa ([CGA](#)) said estimates are for 158.7 million cartons for South Africa. The industry in 2020 exported 146 million, and 130 million in 2019, meaning that, if achieved, the 2021 season could see 22 percent export growth in just two years.

Eswatini and Zimbabwe combined have also increased their export figures from 3.9 million cartons in 2020, to an estimated 4.4 million cartons in 2021 – an increase of 13 percent, bringing the total Southern African volume to be exported to more than 163 million cartons.

Navel oranges and lemons have shown a small increase since last year, while Valencia oranges (5 percent) and grapefruit (16 percent) have shown a stronger increase.

Soft citrus-producing regions are projected to show the most significant growth, with an estimated 30.5 million cartons for export in 2021, 29 percent up on last year.

The late mandarin varieties, in particular, stand out within the soft citrus category, with an expected growth of 42 percent this year.

That being said, the Soft Citrus Focus Group Chairperson has cautioned that these estimates may be adjusted downwards once the season gets underway, as the continued drought in the Eastern Cape and exceedingly wet conditions in the Northern growing regions may affect export volumes negatively.

South Africa's medium-term citrus outlook

Medium-term crop estimates indicate that the citrus industry is expected to continue increasing its exports by another 300 000 metric tons (MT) over the next three years.

The growth projections for soft citrus, lemons and Valencia oranges alone indicate an expected additional R6.8 billion in foreign exchange earnings and the creation of 22 250 sustainable jobs over the next three years.

"These figures indicate phenomenal growth within the South African citrus industry, and for our local economy," the CGA said.

"The demand for our produce overseas is a wonderful testament to the quality of South Africa's citrus fruit. There is no doubt that citrus growers are investing heavily for the

future, with more than R1-billion in grower levies over the next four years going into research and technology to support market access and transformation, while creating an enabling logistics environment to move the fruit."

The CGA said that to maximize the potential of the citrus industry as a South African export, it is going to need "government and other stakeholders to play their part".

"For example, we will be relying heavily on the efficiency of our ports in order to successfully ship the additional 13 million cartons estimated for this year alone," it said.

"We will also need to work hand-in-hand with government to secure, maintain and retain as many market access opportunities as possible. Optimising access conditions will be essential for the continued growth of our industry."