

*Extends U.S. season by one month***South African citrus grower preparing for year-round harvest**

One of the largest growers of South African Summer Citrus is preparing to extend South Africa's export season to the United States. A.L.G. Estates, (www.algestates.com) based in Citrusdal on South Africa's Western Cape region has acquired a citrus farm in higher, more mountainous regions that produces citrus fruit later in the growing season. The new farm is near A.L.G.'s current farming operations.



"The cooler temperatures on the mountain create what is known as a micro-climate, causing the fruit to ripen later in the season. The farm will offer soft citrus or Valencia and Mandarin oranges into January," said Gerrit van der Merwe Jr., head of marketing for A.L.G. Estates. "This is very exciting for us as it is a start toward positioning South Africa as a year-round provider of first quality citrus."

The farm is undergoing expansion from its current 49 acres to include 148 acres of orchards with approximately 72,000 citrus trees capable of producing about 3,000 tons of citrus annually. "Until the new trees mature fully, much of the fruit produced on the farm will remain in South Africa and other countries on the African continent," said Mr. van der Merwe. "While some fruit from this farm was exported to the U.S. during this past season, larger volumes of about 50 tons will be ready for the U.S. market in 2015."

Citrus from South Africa comes to the U.S. from June through October, and is grown primarily in the Western Cape regions of Citrusdal and Clanwilliam and from the Northern Cape regions near Kimberly and Upington. The program to the U.S. began in 1999 and is coordinated by the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF, www.summercitrus.com), a consortium of about 350 South African growers approved to export citrus to the U.S.

The Summer Citrus season starts with the arrival of Clementines to the U.S. in June followed by Navels in late July through September, and traditionally ends in October with Midnight oranges. "The soft citrus from this new farm would extend the South African season to the U.S. by about four weeks and enable us to fill a gap in the marketplace until domestic fruit from California is ready for grocery shelves," said Mr. van der Merwe.

Advances in environmental initiatives on this farm are appealing to U.S. importers anxious to reduce carbon footprints along the supply chain. "We have listened to our importer partners and the retailers who buy our fruit and desire ongoing environmental improvements. Operations on this farm extend our commitment to the environment with reduced energy consumption and more efficient water use," said Mr. van der Merwe. "We are able to irrigate the orchards using gravity or natural pressure rather than pumps, reducing overall energy use. In addition, about 110 employees' homes have been fitted with solar powered water heating systems and pre-paid electricity meters that will help employees improve their economical use of electricity."

With assistance from the South African Department of Environmental Affairs, a program is underway at this new farm as well as A.L.G.'s other locations to reduce foreign vegetation. "These are essentially aggressive growing weeds that threaten the naturally occurring vegetation by consuming ever precious water resources that can be used for the orchards to grow fruit and other products," said Mr. van der Merwe. "An extended benefit is the development of additional work opportunities in our district." Wood obtained from the clean-up operations is further recycled as firewood.

A.L.G. Estates is one of the original homesteads in the region dating to 1767. First commercial operations started there some 150 years ago when the fruit was transported by ox-drawn wagon over a mountain pass and then by train to Cape Town. It is comprised of six citrus producing farms delivering some 16,000 tons of citrus per year. It developed South Africa's first commercial citrus pruning machine now exported worldwide, established the valley's first Black Economic Empowerment project in 1998 and was selected as The South African National Farmer of the Year 2010 by the independent South African Agricultural Writers' Association. Mr. Gerrit van der Merwe Sr. is a founding director and current chairman of the WCCPF.

Next to Spain, South Africa is the second largest exporter of citrus in the world, producing 60 percent of all citrus fruits grown in the Southern Hemisphere. Other than the United States, South Africa's primary export markets include the European Union, Far East, Middle East, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the rest of Africa.

The WCCPF facilitates logistical, marketing and sales support coordination of products for its members. Its mission is to maintain and expand its role as the preferred supplier in the U.S. and throughout the world, and continue to be a reliable supplier of safe summer citrus for the U.S. and all global markets.

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