

2 June 2021

South African pome fruit sector set for record exports in 2021

South Africa's apple and pear production is set for a record export crop this season. Apple exports are expected to rise by five percent year-on-year to 38,4 million 12.5kg equivalent cartons. Pears are due to grow six percent year-on-year to 17.9 million 12.5kg equivalent cartons.

This is according to Hortgro's Trade and Markets Manager, Jacques du Preez, who presented at PMA South Africa's live broadcast in partnership with Beanstalk.Global on 20 May 2021. Other industry experts who joined the conversation were Awie de Jager and Gert Marais at Delecta Fruit, Tracy Davids at Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) and Xavier Murray at Cape Five Export.

Over the last 10 years, the sector has seen a move away from apple exports to Europe and Russia towards Africa, the Far East and Middle Eastern markets percentage-wise, Du Preez said.

According to Davids, Europe will always be an important market for the industry. However, it might not be the one where we will see the most growth in the future. Looking at income growth, population growth, and expectations, Eastern countries will also be important. The sector has seen a lot of growth in exports of apples into Africa, which has a growing consumer base.

BFAP's outlook on the pome fruit sector shows a slow-down in the expansion of the planted area. However, strong growth in production volumes is expected due to higher density plantings, new varieties with high yielding potential, more young orchards coming into production and new technology.

"To remain competitive," Marais said, "we have to take advantage of the country's unique production climate and new technology that could transform the sector. It is also important to understand the preferences of different markets and to play each category's strengths."

Marais said a few varieties are currently dominating the whole apple basket. "I think this could change in the near future as we have very exciting new planting material and varieties."

"In the early nineties, South Africa took the lead in bi-coloured pears production globally with the introduction of Forelle, Rosemarie and Flamingo. Cheeky followed later, and Celina (QT) was added to the basket three years ago. Forelle is susceptible to the fire blight plant disease, and we are fortunate with our climate not conducive to fire blight. Fire Blight causes Forelle trees to die after it was planted in many of the pear production countries of the world," Marais said.

"There is a huge focus on sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices, especially for British and European consumers," De Jager said. "They want fruit that is fresh, safe and healthy."

"South Africa has some of the best producers globally, with a solid base that has been established over many years. We have to build on that and be the first choice for trade and consumers alike," Du Preez concluded.

About Produce Marketing Association

Produce Marketing Association (PMA) is the leading trade association representing companies from every segment of the global produce and floral supply chain. PMA helps members grow by providing connections that expand business opportunities and increase sales and consumption. PMA has a unique network of more than 53,000 member contacts from more than 2,900 member companies, which are based in 54 countries across six continents. These contacts span all sizes and types of businesses across the supply chain. For more information, visit www.pma.com

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