South Africa's lemon success story goes on

By Fred Meintjes | 19 October 2026

South Africa enjoyed a bumper lemon harvest in 2026, during which seedless varieties played an increasingly important role



Image: LemonGold

Despite early season disruptions and difficult trading conditions, South Africa has recorded another bumper lemon export campaign.

The final export crop figure shows that the country packed 51mn cartons in 2026, compared with just 34.7mn cartons in 2023. This represents a rise of nearly 47 per cent in just three years.

Conventional seedless varieties, such as Eureka, still represent the biggest offer, but new seedless options derived from common cultivars are increasing in importance.

One of these is the branded LemonGold seedless lemon, which is slowly bringing a new experience to consumers.

LemonGold is part of the so-called ‘house of brands’ range which has launched successful initiatives such as ClemenGold and Sweet C.

In recent times LemonGold has been offered to consumers in Woolworths stores, to positive reviews.

Despite early season disruptions, growers and exporters reported strong demand for premium lemons in 2026.

“Growing consumer interest in seedless varieties has created new opportunities,” noted the country’s Citrus Growers’ Association (CGA).

“The 2026 South African lemon season once again highlighted how quickly global markets can change, and how success depends on the industry’s ability to adapt.”



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From prolonged rainfall delaying harvests to geopolitical uncertainty disrupting traditional export routes, the season presented the business with a unique set of challenges.

The war in the Middle East certainly came at a most unwelcome time for lemon growers. Industry leaders noted that consumers in Middle Eastern countries strongly favour lemons in the daily diet.

“In total South Africa exports around 20 per cent of its annual crop to the Middle East and the recent expansion in the production and export of lemons requires a stable distribution to all our markets,” the CGA recently outlined.

Despite the disruption of the war, South Africans have said that the business is adapting.

“The old saying is true – the fruit will always find a way to the market. However, it is costing us a lot more,” explained one exporter.

The lemon season concluded more abruptly than usual, with a noticeable drop in volume from mid-July, rather than a gradual tapering off in the harvest.

The latest data on lemon plantings in South Africa shows that there has been a slow-down in the extension of orchards, but the CGA said there is still insistent that further growth on the way, which

will help the industry to achieve its future targets.