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South African citrus celebrates record-breaking export season with 146 million cartons of fruit

Ten months ago, in March 2020, we predicted a bumper export season, estimating that export volumes would reach 143 million cartons of fruit. Now that the final export figures are in, we can announce a record-breaking 2020 export season that delivered 146 million cartons of South African citrus to the rest of the world.

These figures indicate phenomenal growth within the South African citrus industry, which remains the second-largest exporter of fresh citrus in the world after Spain. This achievement is the result of close collaborations and partnerships within the industry and with government, and is testament to the quality of South African citrus fruit which is in demand all over the globe.

It is difficult to tangibly quantify the size and volume of the citrus exported last year, but if we were to stack 146 million cartons of fruit side-by-side, the line of cartons would span approximately 40 000 km in length. That is equal to the height of 4.4 Mount Everest's stacked one on top of the other.

This record-breaking export season follows the gazetting of the new citrus export levy last month, which we believe will enable the citrus industry to grow its global market share even further through reinvesting grower funds into research, market access and transformation. As a result, we hope to create even more jobs and bring in increased revenue for the country's economy over the next four years.

Our current estimates indicate that the citrus industry is expected to increase its exports by another 300 000 tons 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.

This is excellent news for the citrus industry and for South Africa as we start to emerge from the devastation of Covid-19. We are looking forward to playing our part in rebuilding the economy and putting South Africa back on a strong financial footing.

To this end, we are committed to working with all our stakeholders and partners in government to open more international doors for our fruit. If we can continue to gain and expand access in key markets such as the European Union, the United States, China and India, there is no reason why South Africa will not meet long-term industry projections to export 200 million cartons of citrus fruit within the next 5 years.

We look forward to playing our part in South Africa's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan by increasing agricultural exports, creating jobs and continuing to invest in transformation. Together, we can change the lives of many South Africans for the better.

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