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KZN and Gauteng unrest: Citrus industry rolling out a recovery plan to continue exports

The Citrus Grower Association of Southern Africa (CGA) strongly condemns the wave of looting and arson that swept across KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng last week. While the citrus value chain has been impacted, most critically by the closure of the Durban port, the industry has and will continue to ensure that citrus is exported to key markets.

In this regard, growers in the northern provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga have been diverting their fruit to other ports across the country, with citrus from other regions continuing to be exported from Cape Town and Coega ports. Last week saw little impact on volumes of citrus being exported to markets including the European Union, Middle East, China and the United States.

In order to ensure the full recovery of the entire value chain in KwaZulu-Natal, the CGA has been engaging with stakeholders in the public and private sector on a daily basis to get an update on the situational analysis on the ground and to identify any risks that are hampering the full recovery of the supply chain. Through its membership in Agbiz, this information is then being provided to government on a continuous basis.

With calm having been restored in most areas in the province, the Durban port and arterial routes and railways to the port have reopened. All citrus fruit cold storage facilities in the province are also fully secured and operational.

While the port is receiving reefer containers, shipping delays are expected due to bottle-necks caused by last week's shut down, which could also have a knock-on effect at ports in the Eastern and Western Cape that are reliant on reefer containers flowing from the Durban port. The industry has therefore urgently called for ports to open for 24 hours in order to catch up on backlogs and ensure the export season continues to run smoothly.

Traffic is also flowing on the N2 and N3, however, many truck businesses were impacted by the violence last week, which means truck supply is stretched in the region. Many truckers are also only prepared to transport cargo during the day, in light of ongoing security concerns. The CGA has therefore requested that South African Defence Force (SANDF) troops continue to man both highways in order to allow for trucks to run 24 hours a day.

The industry has also called for SANDF troops to continue to be deployed to other key sites across the citrus value chain including Durban port, the NATCOR railway, land food distribution centres and cold stores in hotspot areas such as Hammersdale and Cato Ridge. Crucially, the safety of workers travelling to their workplaces also needs to be guaranteed.

With food shortages still posing an immediate threat in a number of areas in KwaZulu-Natal, the citrus industry is also engaging with government on any assistance it can provide to deliver food and necessities to communities impacted by the unrest.

The CGA remains committed to working with government and stakeholders across the citrus value chain on a recovery plan to continue meeting market demand and to mitigate the devastating impact of the violence on the industry and the country's economy as a whole.

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