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Continued success for SA citrus industry demands integrated management

More than 60% of South Africa's annual citrus production is destined for the export market, a trade that earned R30 billion in foreign exchange in 2021. Over the past two seasons, exports have reached new record highs, showing a cumulative growth of 10%. According to the industry forecasts, export production can increase by up to 500,000 tons over the next three years. This means new markets must be found for the fruit, while protecting and expanding South Africa's existing market share in especially Europe, America and China.

Despite these successes, there are still some variables that are pressuring the industry's profitability. Fertilizer prices have almost doubled over the past year and agrochemical products have increased by an average of 50%. Rising fuel and freight costs have already shrunk producers' profit margins. Uncertainty is further aggravated by a recent increase in labour costs, the risk of global overproduction, and congested international ports where Covid regulations cause severe delays in the distribution of fresh produce.

"Against this backdrop, it is more important than ever for producers to optimally manage the factors that are within their control," says Thinus Smuts from InteliGro. "Producers have a multitude of plant nutrition and crop protection options at their disposal. Ironically, having options also presents a challenge. The different products and approaches must be integrated expertly and correctly into a holistic seasonal program; if not, it is easy to spend money on something that is perfect on paper but not suited to a specific set of circumstances."

There can be no doubt that an integrated approach to citrus cultivation is the key to the future, given that export success starts on the farm. For this agri-sector to achieve its full potential, smarter solutions are needed to address the challenges of rising costs, consumer demands and preferences and market access.

Source: farmersreviewafrica.com

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