

The citrus fruits industry is currently under threat

By [Gilberto Biacuana](#)

11 Jul 2019

The citrus fruit (these include fruits such as oranges, lemons, grapefruits and limes, amongst others) industry is currently under threat with the announcement of the possible arrival of the Asian Greening Disease (AGD), also called Huanglongbing (HLB).



Fruit_Trees via [Fotolia](#)

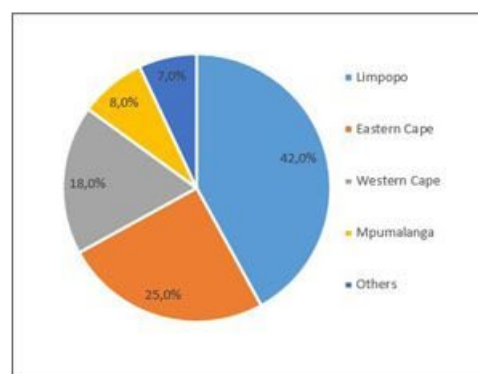
Citrus trees affected by AGD have reduced productivity and fruit quality. The citrus fruit produced is not suitable for sale or for making juice. Importantly, exports from affected countries are banned in the international market which reduces exports from affected countries. Should AGD materialise in South Africa it will have a huge negative impact on the South African citrus fruit industry.

The South African citrus fruit industry is one of the biggest agricultural subsector in South Africa. In 2018, citrus fruits were mainly produced in Limpopo (42.0 %), the Eastern Cape (25.0%), the Western Cape (18.0 %) and Mpumalanga (8.0 %), amongst others (see Figure 1, below).

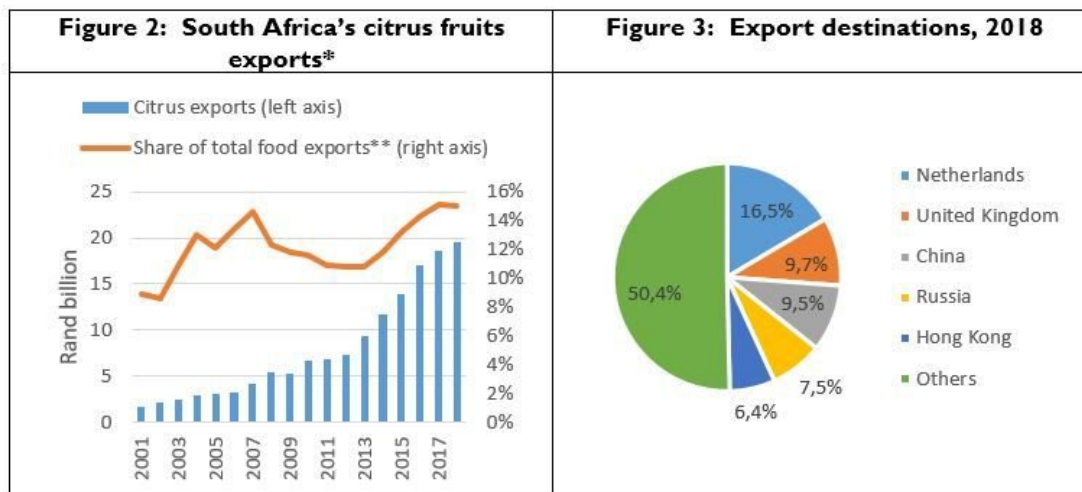
In recent years, the citrus fruit industry has seen exponential growth in exports. Figure 2 below, shows the trends in citrus fruits exports from 2001 to 2018 by value. Citrus fruits exports grew at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.4% from R1.7 billion in 2001 to R19.6 billion in 2018.

The share of citrus fruits exports in South Africa's total food exports was estimated at 15.0% in 2018, with citrus fruits exports valued at R19.6 billion. During 2018, the major destinations for South Africa's citrus fruits exports were the Netherlands (16.5%), the United Kingdom (9.7%), China (9.7%), Russia (7.5%) and Hong Kong (6.4%), amongst others (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 1: Share of area planted to citrus in 2018



Source: Citrus Growers Association (CGA), Land Bank



Source: TradeMap, Land Bank. *HS 0805-citrus fruit, fresh or dry. ** HS 01 to 22 excluding 06.

The export data analysis above underpins the importance of the citrus fruits industry. Furthermore, the industry is an important employer in the rural areas of Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape and Mpumalanga, the leading growth areas of citrus fruits in South Africa.

The economic importance of the citrus fruit industry can be further magnified if one looks at the entire value chain which includes input suppliers, packaging, processing and distribution, amongst others. However, citrus fruits exports have been affected by inefficiencies at the country's harbours such as Durban, Port Elizabeth and Coega.

Nonetheless, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) has devised a preparedness plan in the event that AGD hits the industry.

The plan includes amongst others awareness and training, early detection surveillance, ensuring there is adequate laboratory testing capacity, optimising diagnostic procedures, formulating rapid response actions in the event of incursion detections, enacting pre-emptive regulations, providing for resource requirements, conducting preparatory research on vector control and engaging in international collaboration on research into AGD treatment. It is expected that these measures put in place by government and the industry will mitigate the risks posed by AGD.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gilberto Biacuana is an Economist currently serving as a Research Analyst at Land Bank. He writes in his personal capacity and the views expressed in this article are his own and do not necessarily represent policy positions of Land Bank.

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