

Local plum exports affected by smaller fruit

The plum season in South Africa is two-thirds underway, with varieties such as African Delight, Flavour King, Laetitia, Songold, Southern Belle and Angeleno currently being picked.



Anerma via [pixabay](#)

In the Western Cape, where most plums are produced, growers are still feeling the effects of the drought: The Theewaterskloof Dam is only 31,8% full and the Bergrivier Dam 45,8%. For this reason, volumes are down in most varieties (Laetitia being the exception), fruit size is smaller than usual and there are some issues with shelf life.

“Our volumes are definitely up from last year, but we can’t export all of our fruit, so the remainder is re-directed to the domestic market,” says Wessel Erasmus of Banhoek Fruit Packing that handles plums from their own farm and those from other farms. “The problem is that the local market can’t handle all the plums and prices are under pressure. We struggle to cover the cost of our packing material when sending to the formal markets locally.”

Fortunately, demand for plums in the informal street-trading sector is growing. Erasmus says: “There are an increasing number of guys with bakkies that come and collect plums from us for informal trading channels. They buy red and yellow plums, they don’t mind the colour of the flesh. Plums are growing in popularity in the black consumer market.”

At the largest plum packing facility in the Western Cape, Franschhoek Marketing, an annual average of three million cartons of plums are packaged, of which 90% is exported (class A cartons are mostly 5kg and class B cartons 8kg).

This year the quality seems good but fruit are small, says Jan Hoon, marketing manager. “At the moment, we’re getting good prices from the EU, and about 50% of our plums go there, with the balance divided between the rest of the world. Currently prices in the Middle East and the United Kingdom are a bit down.”

African Delight, a variety developed by the Agricultural Research Council’s Infruitec-Nietvoorbij facility in Stellenbosch, has become a reliable plum for exporters. Not only does it have good eating quality, but it holds up very well during transport. Hoon uses the example of India: The voyage there takes 28 days (compared to, for instance, 16 days to the UK), during which time some plum varieties become overripe, but African Delight arrives in good condition.

The bulk of Franschhoek Marketing’s production is still centred around Laetitia and Songold (both ARC Infruitec-Nietvoorbij varieties) as well as Angeleno.

Growing African trade

The African market for plums is growing. “Africa likes variation in a container, so we don’t ship containers filled with a single fruit. Plums transport well, and we do about 90% red plums and 10% yellow, but in low quantities with other fruit and sometimes even with vegetables in a container,” explains Jan Stefan Ferreira of Qualichoice Exporters.

Yoann Bleusez of Kallos Exporters agrees, adding that infrastructure development, such as cooling facilities, is crucial to growing an African market for South African fresh produce. The main markets for fruit from South Africa are the oil-producing countries in West Africa (although exports have been affected by a slump in the oil price), followed by East Africa. Countries along the coast, with port facilities, are the largest importers. – [Fresh Plaza](#)

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