

SA stone fruit producers remain positive despite drought challenges

There has been little relief from the drought in the Western Cape and South African producers have been forced to implement drastic and ingenious plans to counter climatic conditions and ensure that they will be able to see the season through. Despite the challenges of the drought, producers have proven themselves resilient and South African can fulfil its commitments to the market for the 2017/2018 season.



GerdSchiffler [pixabay](#)

In the face of this difficult task, they remain positive that they will be able to manage their limited resources optimally during the 2017/2018 season and produce an average to slightly below-average sized stone fruit crop.

Minimal decrease in yields expected

Many new orchards have been established in the last five years, and this will have a significant impact on the total export estimate as these trees come into bearing this season. This counters the decrease expected as a direct result of the drought. The industry has used a very reliable model to predict the expected export harvest over a number of years. This proven methodology predicts that in a normal climatic year these new orchards would have added 1.4 million cartons to the plum estimate, 420,000 cartons to the nectarine estimate, and 235,000 cartons to the peach estimate as compared to the 2017 season.

The impact of the drought will cause these increases not to materialise but does mean that a decrease of only 4% is expected for plum exports and 3% for nectarines and peaches, compared to the 2016/17 season. Apricot exports are expected to decrease by 17% as a down alternate bearing year is likely to come into play as well.

Product	Carton eqv (kg)	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	3 yr avg	2017/2018 ESTIMATE	2017/2018 vs Previous
Apricots	4.75	971 581	810 619	699 864	774 240	761 575	640 877	-17% -133 363
Nectarines	2.5	2 949 206	3 740 896	4 017 425	4 122 833	3 960 385	3 995 323	-3% -127 510
Peaches	2.5	1 571 234	1 984 663	2 212 478	2 169 010	2 122 050	2 113 722	-3% -55 289
Plums	5.25	10 512 857	11 507 330	11 074 170	12 349 114	11 643 538	11 900 064	-4% -449 050

The general feeling is that the early production regions and cultivars will have enough water to raise good crops, while pressure is expected on cultivars to be harvested from February 2018 onwards, should the current conditions persist.

Dry conditions, great tasting fruit

On the bright side, great tasting fruit with high sugar levels are expected and the prevalence of pests and diseases are also likely to be very low due to the dry conditions.

The situation will be monitored from week to week and relevant adjustments made to the estimates as the season unfolds. Hortgro will regularly update crop estimates in order to inform all role players.

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