

South Africa faces a mixed table grape season, with rains and further strike possibilities throwing wild cards into an otherwise positive year. 

Pieter Karsten of the Orange River's Karsten Farms anticipated lower output due to rains in the region, a top table grape producer in South Africa.

"It's a season of two halves. The first part of the season had higher volumes than anticipated and the second part of the season has lower volumes due to rain. All and all, it will be down," Karsten said.

He said quantity could drop 5% to 15%, although export volumes should remain the same.

Leon de Kock of the Hex River Region's Grape Alliance Marketing said for his production zone, output looked good.

He forecast 50 million to 55 million 4.5-kilogram cartons from South Africa by the end of the season, a number on par with the previous year.

"I think we can expect a normal season. The only thing that's a bit of a worry at the moment is they're threatening to have some strike action by Wednesday. But except for that, we expect everything to be normal," de Kock said.

"There haven't been much negotiations so far. Nobody's pitched up on negotiations from the side of the workers. So it's just a political game. So we're just waiting to see what happens further."

In December, the Western Cape's farm worker strike had been delayed until Wednesday, Jan. 9. An agreement must be made by then to avoid further unrest that shook the nation's agriculture industry in the closing months of 2012.

In the meantime, de Kock said prices are up from last season and that the Crimson and Autumn Royal varieties are looking very promising.

As the region entered packing, de Kock said quality looked good, although they had not yet heard back from importers to confirm the quality of arrivals.

For the Orange River Region, Karsten said the late Thompson variety looked best.

Related stories: [South Africa farm worker strike suspended until Jan. 9](#)



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