

South Africa's Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF) has announced a new addition to its import destinations in the U.S., after seven containers filled with Navel oranges arrived recently at the Port of Houston. 

In a release, the WCCPF said another four containers were scheduled to arrive on or around Sept. 9.

"We are very excited about this expanded program to the US," said the forum's CEO Suhanra Conradie.

"It has been our plan to better meet the need of importers as well as retail stores in the mid-and far west points of the US."

As the largest container port on the Gulf Coast and the seventh largest container port in the country, Houston was chosen for its location and state-of-the-art facilities used to inspect the fruit on arrival.

"Houston is an excellent gateway and provides a central location enabling greater efficiencies of time and cost," Conradie said.

"It offers us the capability to serve the market needs of the entire Midwest area from Houston to Chicago, and points west."

Capespan North America and Seald Sweet are the two importers receiving the fruit from the shipments to Houston, with Capespan receiving the majority.

"The expansion of the program to the Port of Houston will enable us to better meet the needs of our retail customers," said Capespan North America senior VP Marc Solomon.

"Having the fruit arrive in the South Western region of the US allows us to service clients in the South West and Midwest, getting to the retailers and ultimately to consumers only that much more quickly. Improved efficiencies result in lower costs for the consumer at a time when nutrition and healthy food options are essential."

Seald Sweet CEO Mayda Sotomayor highlighted her company has been importing South African summer citrus since 1999 and had been a leader in growing the category in the United States.

"This is a next logical step in the expansion of the import/export program from South Africa and helps us continue meeting the needs of our customers," Sotomayor said.

The release highlighted South Africa exported around 42,000 metric tons (MT) of citrus to the U.S. per year to the Port of Newark (containers) and the Port of Philadelphia at Gloucester City, NJ. Varieties include Clementines, Navels, Midnight Valencias and Star Ruby Grapefruit.

"With the success of the pilot program to Houston, we expect to export more fruit there in 2015," Conradie added.

"While our export volumes have remained steady in recent years, we envision the potential for greater volumes to the US as demand for our high quality fruit continues to grow."

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