

South Africa's citrus industry continues to rake in export revenue of around R20bn (US\$1.4bn) annually despite ongoing challenges such as drought and container delays, an industry representative said.

The country, which has packed 126-million cartons of citrus fruit for export globally, remains the second-largest global exporter of citrus fruit.

In a statement, Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) CEO Justin Chadwick said that while this year's packed total is lower than last year's bumper crop of 136-million boxes, production remains very high, with the industry remaining a valuable source of income and jobs for South Africa.

"Despite events beyond the control of growers, the industry again managed to contribute around R20bn in export revenue for the country," he noted.

Dry conditions in some the northern areas of the country have affected some growers and have impacted on production volumes, he said.

However, Chadwick noted: "Fortunately, South Africa has such a diverse spread of growing regions that the decline remains within the acceptable targets established by the industry."

While oranges and grapefruit production has suffered, soft citrus and lemons have exceeded last year's production.

The extended strike at the Ngqura Container Terminal, near Port Elizabeth, as well as ongoing problems with infrastructure, staff and logistics at all South African ports, however, have "proved a nightmare for fresh produce exporters," Chadwick adds.

He said the CGA has actively engaged with Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan to resolve the problems. Gordhan visited the Durban port on Monday to engage with exporters in the hope of finding constructive solutions to the problem.

With support from the government to expand market access and improve port infrastructure, Chadwick believes the industry is poised to continue to grow its export volumes.