

South Africa's agricultural organizations have sought to assure the domestic and international industry that operations will continue despite a coming lockdown from Thursday night.

President Cyril Ramaphosa on Monday evening [announced the country will go on a nationwide lockdown](#) with the exception of essential services in a bid to contain and slow the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) in the country.

Umbrella organization Fruit South Africa highlighted that there are exceptions to restrictions, including those involved in the production, distribution and supply of food and basic goods.

"Agricultural operations will continue," said Justin Chadwick, chairman of Fruit South Africa.

"It would be wrong to say it is 'business as usual' as we will need to change some of what we do - but operations must continue."

With the South African citrus, pome and avocado season now in full swing and the table grape season into its final two weeks, it is essential for the industry to remain calm and focus on the continuation of business.

South African ports will remain open for the import and export of essential goods.

Fruit South Africa said the industry is committed to making 21 days of the lockdown count and be part of the solution by continuing to supply fruit to consumers domestically and abroad while all measures are being taken to protect workers and their families.

It added it has also developed a set of guidelines to educate the industry on basic hygiene in the workplace, screening and social distancing. It is critical that those who are allowed to continue operating, do so responsibly.

Hortgro, which represents South Africa's pome fruit and stonefruit growers, assured that the agricultural value chain is classified as an essential service.

Farms and packhouses will, therefore, be able to continue their activities within the constraints of risk management practices and that products will be able to flow to domestic and foreign markets, it said.

Earlier Jacques du Preez, Hortgro's general manager for trade and markets, indicated that

the apple harvest looked especially good this year and was hoping that the pandemic will not influence exports or the markets. Indications in Europe have been that due to the pandemic the demand for fresh fruit and vegetable have increased.

Hortgro said in a statement that “as an industry, we take note and is concerned about the Covid-19 outbreak and will follow the Government’s protocols and guidelines pertaining to the situation and support President Cyril Ramaphosa’s declaration of a national state of emergency.

“We advise all role-players in the fruit value chain to adhere to government protocols and do everything in their power to protect themselves and workers.”

Hortgro has also informed South Africa's stone and pome producers to make sure that agricultural workers received the correct information regarding the outbreak.

“Disinformation fuels anxiety. We are asking producers to keep their workforce informed with the correct information and to keep everyone calm, by following protocols,” said Hortgro’s executive director, Anton Rabe.

South Africa’s confirmed number of coronavirus cases rose to 554 on Tuesday, up from 402 a day earlier.