

Growers in the South African stone fruit industry say they are "optimistic about the season ahead" and the prospects of delivering a more robust bounty to the UK market.

After facing numerous challenges during the 2019-20 season - which runs from November to May - because of the Covid-19 pandemic and tough weather conditions, the organization Hortgro says improvements across the board are showing, both in the quality and quantity of crops as well as the further opening of ports.

"The stone fruit forecast and overall estimate volumes are looking much better compared to the same time last year," said Jacques du Preez, General Management of Trade and Markets at Hortgro, said.

"For plums in particular, the favourable weather conditions have definitely had a positive impact on fruit set for this coming season and we are optimistic about the harvest."

Hortgro says it will continue to develop the plum, peach and nectarine categories in the UK, where it has launched marketing efforts here around their fresh produce for the past 12 years.

Plum growers anticipate a 22% bump compared to last season, to 10.8 million cartons. Meanwhile, nectarines will grow from nearly 5 million cartons to just over 5.5 million cartons (2.5kg), and peaches expect a 5% increase to 2.1 million cartons.

Hortgro says young, productive orchards, in addition to the weather, have helped this season. Varieties to look out for this season include Fortune and African Delight plums, Ambercrest and Spring Princess peaches, and Super Star and Tiffany nectarines.

"The industry is confident that the logistical challenges experienced during the past year due to COVID-19 is something of the past and is looking forward to a great season," du Preez says.

Retailers can expect to see the usual array of campaign materials from Hortgro, which will include in-store promotions, advertising and editorial plus social media activity that will feature new recipe styling and photography.