

As exports of stone fruit from South Africa and Chile continue into the middle of their respective seasons, both locations are seeing small delays but are overall pleased with how the season is progressing.

After three difficult years, South Africa and its clients are happy with a normal crop, industry members told FreshFruitPortal.com.

"I'm a lot more positive about this season than I would have been last year around this time," Lohan Marais, Commercial Director at Icon Fruit said

Hortgro, the organization that represents South Africa's stone fruit growers, reported updated numbers in volumes with increases across the board.

Plums are estimated to be up by 27% for the season, returning to a normal crop season while peaches and nectarines are also expected to be up by eight and 10 percent, respectively.

Apricot export volumes are exceeding [initial export estimates](#) and are currently up 90% compared to last season

Marais said: "with good luck and good weather we may even get to 12 million cartons of plums."

This increase in volumes is due to a winter with good rains and cooler spring temperatures during the flowering period.

The sizes of the stone fruit are bigger, which also "helps increase the number of cartons that are exported", according to Jacques du Preez, General Manager of Trade and Markets at Hortgro.

"The fruits on the trees are ripening nicely, the color of the fruit and the Brix levels are also good," Marais said.

In Chile, exporters haven't had a bad go of it though are just beginning to see normal sizes and volumes catching up to predicted numbers.

"I expect good demand and movement throughout January and February, however just like every year, too much volume will add pressure to the market," Sebastian Rodriguez, North America Marketing Manager at Verfrut said.

Older varieties of plums with small sizes will not be sent to the U.S. as they won't do well there, according to Rodriguez.

"The overall response from the markets has been positive, but we will have to wait to see what happens with the proliferation of the pandemic to have an accurate view of how the market is behaving," Manuel Aspillaga, Commercial Manager at Gesex said.

"We aren't worried about the fruit that is in retail programs in the U.S., EU and Latin America, but the wholesale markets will undoubtedly be watched to see how everything goes."

South Africa on the other hand, seems to have contingency plans in place to react as soon as possible if personnel or exports take a hit from a Covid-19 related issue.

"At the start of Covid-19 in 2020, forums were created in which discussions take place on a regular basis in order to make sure that the ports can accommodate the fruit that needs to be exported," du Preez said.

"In-season, these meetings take place weekly with fruit industries, Transnet, shipping lines, exporters and logistics service providers."

As the season continues, "we are in a good position to keep on supplying all our orders and programs in the retail we are servicing," Marais said.