

Vanguard International is expecting an "excellent" South African apple and pear season overall, despite weather issues in the Eastern Cape that affected production.

The first apple and pear crop estimate is seeing an increase of 4% in apples to 38 million cartons and 2% in pears to 17 million.

The main apple and pear production areas in South Africa's Western region had a good winter season with ample rain, snow, and cold units, it said.

This was followed up by a very good flower and set phase between October and December 2020. This all represents a good indicator for a strong apple and pear crop, Vanguard said.

"The Western Cape experienced less wind and overall good weather conditions," it said.

"Unfortunately the Eastern Cape did not experience the same. In mid-January, a hail storm ripped through the Eastern Cape production area of Langkloof. 1,500 of the 5,500Ha were affected."

But, it said, in total "we are still predicting an excellent apple and pear crop for 2021".

Like many other fresh produce commodities, South African apple and pear crops are five to 10 days later compared to 2020.

The expected increase in pear production this season follows a 2 percent drop last year.

Apples are growing in volume for the second year in a row. The reason for this growth is mostly due to new plantings coming into production.

This is part of South Africa's major replanting and renewal strategy after the drought three years ago, Vanguard said.

"All indications show this crop will produce good colors on both apples and pears. The early varieties are between 5 and 10 days delayed, but the mid and late season varieties are tracking on time," it said.

"This will put some pressure on the pack houses and cold rooms, but our growers will be able to manage this well."

The Early Bon Cretien made its way to the pack houses, but the sizing was small with peak counts around 112/96/120. Two additional pear varieties being packed now are the

Flamingo and Rosemary crops with a smaller size than past seasons and peak sizes very similar to early Bon Cretien.

The picking of Flamingo, Rosemary, and Early BC's will be finished by the second week of February, while normal WBC (Williams Bon Cretien) will start in week 7. All these varieties tend to be smaller than last year which is usually an indicator of a bigger overall crop.

The picking of Packhams will start in week 5 or 6. A much larger crop is expected this year than last, 6% to be exact.

The growth is mostly due to new plantings coming into production and an overall cleaner product due to less wind damage this year. Peak size will be around count 70/80, but this could change region to region.

"Forelles are still a way off with the early packing starting in week 11/12. Judging on other earlier varieties we are expecting good volumes," Vanguard said.

The Panomara Goldens started the first week of February and will be packed shortly with peak sizes between 150 and 165 making it slightly bigger than last year.

"The Royal Gala's will be picked in volume and packed in early March. The color is very good and peak sizes are around 165/180. Color is similar to last year, which was an already good color year. We expect good quality product with decent size this year," it said.

Golden Delicious will follow one week later also in March due to the fact that the crop is 5 to 10 days late.