

The new South African citrus season is quickly approaching, bringing with it "excitement and cautious optimism" for the 2021 season, according to multinational fruit supplier Vanguard.

All regions, with the exception of the Eastern Cape, are showing an increase in overall citrus variety volumes, it said.

"The Eastern Cape continues to face challenging weather and drought conditions. The areas most impacted by the rain levels are Hankey and Patensie specifically. The Sundays River Valley area are fairing slightly better with water amounts," Vanguard said.

"All other regions including Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape have recovered from last season's drought and had an excellent winter weather-wise. The strong rain season along with new plantings are pushing the South African Citrus industry to new heights."

It noted there has been a positive growth trend for South African citrus over recent years, with export cartons totaling 130 million in 2019, 146 million in 2020, and expectations of 159 million in 2021.

Compared to 2020 Vanguard is seeing an almost 9% increase in South African citrus volumes anticipated for 2021, it said. The biggest growth realized will be in soft citrus and lemons," it said.

Lemon crops have already started and the estimate is around 30.2 million cartons, which is a 1.5 million increase from last year.

The Sundays River Valley in the Eastern Cape is the single biggest producing area at 14 million cartons. Sizing is on the small side and peak sizes is around 113, 138 and 100 with good quality and conditions to date.

The grapefruit volumes estimate for 2021 is 15.2 million cartons, which is a 15% increase on last season.

White grapefruit will account for just over 1 million cartons of the overall crop, while the remaining 14 million cartons will be red grapefruit. Red Grapefruit has been steadily increasing over the past 15 years. Peak grapefruit sizes are expected to be around 40/45.

All grapefruit crop regions have experienced positive weather to date with strong dams filled to the rim. More rain is expected over the next month which we are monitoring

closely, but for now everything is looking very good.

The very first grapefruits were packed the first week of April with small volumes. The peak will be between week 20 and 24 before volumes taper.

Soft Citrus are still a ways away from packing. Some Satsuma are available on the local market however, very little for export at this stage. The crop estimate for Soft Citrus is 30.5 million cartons which is almost a 30% increase over 2020.

Oranges are another five to six weeks away from packing. All indications are that Navels will be consistent to last year with 26 million cartons while the Valencia crop is estimated to see a 5% increase at 57.9 million cartons, Vanguard said.