

Despite the challenges of the pandemic and having to ship rather than fly most of its stone fruit to the U.K., Hortgro said South Africa had one of its most successful seasons in recent memory.

This 2020-21 campaign saw increases across the board in exports, including a 29% boost in nectarines where the U.K. took on 50% of the volume and a 22% rise in peaches (41% going to the U.K.). Hortgro also says plum exports increased 71% (15.2 million cartons).

Those are amazing numbers given the weather conditions from the previous year and the sea changes that were made around Covid-19 - everything from shipping to a focus on online to reaching customers through advertorials and promotions.

As the UK began to open further, its front of store shroud units, on-pack labels and recipe tear-off cards all helped drive awareness and sales, Hortgro says.

“You will always have exceptions due to climatic conditions differing between the various production regions and even within a region, but we had a near-perfect season from a production point of view,” Jacques du Preez, Head of Hortgro, said.

“After the ongoing drought of the previous seasons most factors worked in our favour: we had enough irrigation water in most regions and experienced a good winter, we had a mild spring and summer with no heatwaves that have caused problems in the past and fruit set, quality and packouts were really good. A number of orchards planted in the last 3 years also proved their potential this year.”

Now the group is looking ahead to top fruit as South African apples and pears start to arrive here through October. This season, Hortgro expects to boost its exports of apples and pears to the UK by 5% (38.4 million cartons) and 6% (17.9 million cartons), respectively. It credits the growth of young orchards and better weather conditions for the strong outlook.

Consumers can expect several varieties of apples (Golden Delicious, Royal Gala, Granny Smith, Fuji, Pink Lady, Cripps Red, Cripps Pink) and pears (Packham’s Triumph, Forelle, Williams Bon Chretien, Vermont Beauty)

The latest Beautiful Country, Beautiful Fruit campaign will include “seasonal recipes, support and coverage in consumer media publications both online and on social media,” according to the organization.