

South Africa is to begin exporting lemons to the Chinese market following the recent signing of a revised phytosanitary protocol between the two countries, an industry body said.

The Citrus Growers' Association of South Africa (CGA) said it expects the country to surpass South American suppliers in terms of volume sent to China over the next three years.

With local lemon production expected to grow by 175,000MT by 2024, the finalization of the revised protocol means China will now become "a critical new market" for this growth and will secure R325 million (US\$23 million) in new export revenue, it said.

The revised protocol was six years in the making, following a request submitted by the citrus industry to exempt lemons from the current regulatory requirements for False Coddling Moth (FCM) in light of the category not being a host for the pest.

Up to now, Argentina and Chile have dominated southern hemisphere lemon exports to China, the CGA said. However, the CGA said that once the revised protocol is in place, it expects South Africa to surpass both countries, exporting 25,000MT of lemons to China by 2024.

The local industry has already enjoyed phenomenal growth in exports to China in recent years with shipments of grapefruit, orange and soft citrus reaching 130,000MT in 2020.

"We are thrilled that the finalisation of the revised protocol will further expand our reach in this critical market and would like to thank the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) and Citrus Research International for their work on getting the revised protocol across the line," said Justin Chadwick, CEO of the CGA.

This milestone also follows the recent first shipment of South African citrus to the Philippines, which will also result in new export earnings of close to R205 million annually.