

The CEO of South Africa's table grape association says that the industry's sustainability is "at risk, due to the combination of numerous factors at play within the broader environment".

Writing in a regular newsletter, AJ Griesel of the South African Table Grape Industry (SATI) said the sector's reliance on world-class infrastructure including dependable electricity supply, functioning and effective ports as well as good road infrastructure represent the building blocks of its logistical chain and are critical for its sustainability.

"The urgency of this matter cannot be overemphasised; hence SATI remains in constant contact with [port operator] Transnet, through various forums, to ensure that the Cape Town port remains on the agenda," he said.

"Waiting periods experienced this season simply cannot be repeated, as these have a direct impact on the quality of our grapes. Obtaining the necessary input from industry leaders, especially regarding logistics, remains a priority. International disruption of shipping remains a concern, however we have little control over the matter."

He added that the rising costs across the board have put serious pressure on the industry, at the same time that larger grape volumes from South America have pushed prices downwards in markets.

"Increased global inflation, specifically the high figures prevalent in Europe and America, exacerbate this economic situation and support what we already know - grape prices at certain levels are simply not sustainable," he said.

"Recent Covid-19 related restrictions in China have highlighted the fact that this market is simply not conducive at certain times. Market development of new markets remains a strategic priority, however structural challenges exist which urgently need to be addressed.

"The above synopsis provides perspective into the challenges our industry faces, and although we have not touched on all aspects in depth, our objective is to provide a balanced viewpoint considering a large harvest in volume is not necessarily the measure of sustainability."

Export figures for the 2021-22 season

As of week 15, South Africa had exported 68.4 million cartons of grapes and 77.4 million had been inspected and passed for export.

The export figure is slightly below last season but well above the previous two, while the intake volume is at a record high for this point in the season.