



Be Organic Ltd

SA Citrus 2017 Update

The Eastern Cape has experienced a drought since October 2015. It seems extraordinary that they can produce any crop in such conditions. However the Sundays River Valley enjoys the benefit of a canal system that was built in the 1980s and diverts water from the Orange River north of Pretoria and into this region.

This recent drought was broken around 20th February 2017 when 61mm of rain fell over three days. The drought had been beneficial in the fight against Citrus Black Spot. CBS, being a fungus, does not succeed in dry conditions. So we expect no issues from CBS this season due to the climatic conditions but primarily due to the continued with the hard work in the orchards to eradicate this pest. There has also been talk in the EU of concerns with regard to the False Coddling Moth. Although F.C.M. Can be an issue in the Eastern Cape, well run organic farms do not consider it an issue. They encourage and introduce too many natural predators for whom the F.C.M. is a food source. Blue Crane farms have recorded just 1 male F.C.M. In their monitoring traps this season to date.

Before the rains we were expecting fruit size to be average or below for the coming season. However, two factors have changed this. One a considerable fruit drop in February will result in fewer Navels and so an increase in average fruit size.

Also something surprising has occurred. During the drought the trees are only irrigated through the trickle irrigation system. So only the same areas are watered. The roots in these locations have absorbed a high percentage of nutrients from the surrounding soil. When a natural rainfall occurs it covers a wide circumference around the trees. The trees have scouting root systems. They have been lying dormant but suddenly are able to draw up moisture from soils high in beneficial products = super foods. When this occurs in late summer it stimulates the fruit immediately with an increase in fruit size. Conclusion, our Navel oranges, clementines and early lemons will move up 1-2 fruit sizes. Navels were looking to peak on 88. Now there will be very few 105, limited on 88 and heavy on 72 and 56's. Clementines we should see very few calibre 5's and reaching 1's- 3's (perfect for the UK). Early lemons are not destined for UK/EU so of no consequence.

There have also been some good late rains in the Orange River region. The Lemon crop was expected to be way down due to the extended heatwave (45-50°C for weeks on end) so high fruit drop and high % sun scald, The rain will increase the fruit size considerably on the remaining fruit.

Blue Crane 2017 Estimates

We will continue the policy to picking fruit on the green side (example lemon colour plate 4) to increase shelf life in the target export markets.

Navels we plan to start packing 10th – 15th May for arrival early June. (We see EU Valencia oranges having an extended season due to generally poor winter demand)

Clementines a generally smaller expected crop but the general sizing more in tune with the market requirements. Start packing early May to arrive early June.

Lemons overall a good yield .With the large range of older groves and young ones we will have a broad range of sizing. The first flowering fruit will be ready to cut in April but the target market for these will be Canada and the conventional market in the Middle East. There will be some lemons loaded to fill out containers with clementines.



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The bulk of the lemons will be from fruit set by second and third flowering to arrive into the EU from mid-June- late September.

Mandarins- Nadorcotts: we expect a similar volume to last year. Some trees have a potential full set and others almost zero.

Valencia oranges: too early for any realistic estimates. However this resistant variety that always seems to produce a reasonable crop.

Grapefruit again too early to estimate but we trust that this is a high year for this bi-annual cropping variety. 2016 was a low yielding season. Early fruit we will get from the Orange River as usual.

Future

The Blue Crane family trust has a new farm for fruits and vegetables called Steenbok. It has been so long in the planning we thought it might never happen. Things do not happen overnight in South Africa.

We now have water rights granted on 450 hectares of a cattle farm in the natural bush veldt. The infrastructure is in place. The reservoirs have been built. The pump station, underground piping, electric fences are built and linked to the national grid. The ground is cleared on phase one: - 80 hectares is to be planted with citrus (lemons, nadorcotts and late chislet navels) plus vegetables (butternut squash, gem squash and sweet potatoes arrival February to May 2018 onwards)

We have butternut squash and gem squash arriving March 2017 onwards from the farms that had spare plots available. So all systems go and an interesting diversion to give us almost all year around products to harvest and market.

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