

CHINA GRANTS MARKET ACCESS TO ZIMBABWE CITRUS FRUIT EXPORTERS: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ZIMBABWE?



Source: Twitter @ChineseZimbabwe.

On 1 June 2023, the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) released the list of registered Zimbabwean eleven (11) orchards and six (6) pack houses that can now export citrus fruit to China. The fresh citrus to be exported include the following categories:

- Mandarin (*Citrus reticulata*)
- Orange (*Citrus sinensis*)
- Grapefruit (*Citrus Paradisi*)
- Lemon (*Citrus limon*)
- Lemon (*Citrus aurantifolia*)
- Sour orange (*Citrus aurantium*)

The opening of Chinese market for Zimbabwe`s citrus fruit is good news for citrus farmers because Zimbabwe`s international trade in citrus fruits had mixed fortunes in 2021. According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), Zimbabwe was the 29th world exporter of citrus fruit. It exported \$42.1M in citrus. The main destination of Citrus exports from Zimbabwe were: South Africa (\$10.8M), Spain (\$5.56M), Netherlands (\$4.27M), Portugal (\$2.48M), and Poland (\$2.26M).” At the same year, Citrus was the 13th most exported product in Zimbabwe. The markets for Zimbabwe citrus fruits were also fast declining in some of these traditional markets. OEC reported the following decline

in 2021, Netherlands -\$6.74m (-61.2%), Portugal -\$3.31m (-57.2%) and the United Kingdom -\$774k (-66.8%). The opening of the Chinese market serves to compensate for the European declining markets and also helps Zimbabwe to diversify its markets.

China is adding to the other growing export markets for Zimbabwe's citrus fruit. The OEC reported that the fastest growing export markets for Citrus of Zimbabwe between 2020 and 2021 were South Africa (\$3.49M), Poland (\$1.57M), and Russia (\$1.55M).

On the other hand, Zimbabwe is not a great importer of citrus fruits. OEC observed that in 2021, Zimbabwe imported \$233k in Citrus, becoming the 172nd largest importer of Citrus in the world. At the same year, Citrus was the 677th most imported product in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe imports Citrus primarily from: South Africa (\$214k), United Arab Emirates (\$19.6k), and China (\$5).

The fastest growing import markets in Citrus for Zimbabwe between 2020 and 2021 were South Africa (\$110k), United Arab Emirates (\$19.6k), and China (\$5).¹

The main challenge for Zimbabwean citrus farmers will be to meet the stringent phytosanitary requirements set by China. According to the Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe, Guo Shaochun, *"Under this protocol, Zimbabwean citrus fruits exported to China must comply with the relevant phytosanitary laws, regulations and health and safety standards of China, satisfy the phytosanitary requirements as stipulated in the protocol, and be free of the quarantine pests."*

The notable pests that are highlighted by the Chinese side as being problematic include Mediterranean fruit fly (Ceratitis capitata), Natal fruit fly (Ceratitis rosa), false codling moth (Thaumetobia leucotreta), bunch mite (Brevipalpus californicus) and oriental fruit fly (Bactrocera dorsalis).²

The protocol further requires that exporters put in place cold chain system for fresh citrus fruits exports to address the phytosanitary issues. Acquisition of cold rooms may prove to be expensive to many small holder farmers.

Measures were put in place to mitigate the above challenge. The exporters need to register with the Zimbabwe Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Settlement (MLWRRS). They should get approval from both the MLWRRS and GACC. The registration record should be sent to GACC by MLWRRS before the start of the export season. MLWRRS will carry-out pre-shipment inspection to confirm compliance with quality requirements and export standards. On the other hand, China has agreed to provide technical assistance to Zimbabwe regarding fresh citrus export to China.

Women and youths in farming should aim to benefit from this market access. The main challenge will be to meet to the high phytosanitary standards as the costs may also be high. What may be needed is for women and youths in farming to come together, pool financial resources and operate as clusters or cooperatives. It will be easier for the government to assist well organised groups than dealing with infant farmers operating as individuals. The government should continue facilitating training from the Chinese agricultural experts and help in mobilising resources for community cold rooms and processing of fresh citrus fruits.

Another strategy is for women and youths in farming is to provide out-grower services to established export farmers to allow skills transfer over time.

¹ <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/citrus/reporter/zwe#>

² http://www.chinafrica.cn/Homepage/202209/t20220922_800307476.html

Zimbabwe is working on adding blue berries, avocados and chillies in the export basket to China. According to the Zimbabwe National Export Strategy, “the potential of the horticultural farming sector in Zimbabwe lies in its climatic conditions which are conducive for horticultural farming. The European market has long been a major consumer of horticultural produce from Zimbabwe especially flowers.” The opening of Chinese markets to Zimbabwean citrus fruits is providing exporters with an option to choose where to sell their produce. Zimbabwean exporters will not be relying on European markets only which are already declining. The Chinese markets will motivate more farmers to venture into citrus fruit farming on condition that they can meet the required export standards.

China has provided a great opportunity to Zimbabwe citrus fruit farmers. China is among the largest world markets for citrus fruits and this presents a great potential for the Zimbabwean citrus industry. Expanding citrus export market to China may result in the generation of additional foreign earnings. As citrus farmers increase production to meet Chinese demand, this may lead to job creation for farm workers and other agriculture experts. The government should guard this market jealously by ensuring that all citrus fruit exports to China meets international standards and quality requirements.

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