

To: Mr. Justin Chadwick
Chief Executive Officer
Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa
Hillcrest 3650
KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

From: Nicholas Gutierrez
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Subject: March - 2025 USA Report

USDA & USTR Cabinet Level Leadership:

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):

Secretary of Agriculture – Brooke Rollins (confirmed on February 13)

Deputy Secretary – Stephen Vaden (waiting U.S. Senate confirmation)

Under-Secretary for Marketing & Regulatory Programs – Dudley Hoskins (waiting U.S. Senate confirmation & will head the Animal & Plant Inspection Service/APHIS and the Agricultural Marketing Service/AMS)

Under-Secretary for Trade & Foreign Agricultural Affairs – Luke Lindberg (waiting U.S. Senate confirmation and is responsible for managing the Foreign Agricultural Service/FAS)

U.S. Trade Representative (USTR):

Ambassador U.S. Trade Representative – Greer Jamison (confirmed on February 27)

USTR Chief Agricultural Negotiator – No Nominee named to date to replace Doug McKalip

U.S. Department of State:

Secretary of State – Marco Rubio (confirmed on January 21)

U.S. Ambassador to South Africa - No Nominee to date has been announced. Current rumors indicate that Mr. Joel Pollak is the early favorite. He was born in Johannesburg and migrated to the United States where he graduated with honors from Harvard Law School after gaining initial degrees from the University of Cape Town and Harvard College.

U.S. Ambassador to Botswana: Ambassador Howard Van Vranken: Career Ambassador Van Vranken remains in his position with no indication to date that the new Administration will replace him.

South Africa Government in the U.S.:

South Africa Ambassador to the U.S.- Unfortunately, Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool was expelled from his current position by the Trump Administration on March 21 after just assuming his new position in Washington, D.C., on January 13. Early rumors of potential candidates to replace him include:

- Trevor Manuel: Highly respected former Finance Minister with extensive international experience.
- Andries Nel: Seasoned politician with abundant experience in law and governance, including public policy and international diplomacy.
- Tony Leon: Former leader of the Democratic Alliance and recognized for his sharp diplomatic acumen and ability to engage proactively with international partners.

Communication with USDA - Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS):

South Africa Citrus Black Spot (CBS) Rule: USDA contacts reported that the incoming USDA leadership has requested that all Sanitary/Phytosanitary (SPS) Trade decisions be temporarily put on hold until the two new Under/Secretaries for Marketing & Regulatory Programs (APHIS & Agricultural Marketing Service) and Trade & Foreign Agricultural Affairs (Foreign Agricultural Service) are confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The newly confirmed Under/Secretaries can then review all agricultural SPS trade matters via the new Administration's trade objectives.

As a result, the CBS rule is still completely frozen but note that the first Trump Administration made the original decision to link the CBS rule with U.S. pork and poultry back in 2018. I believe that the 2 issues will remain intrinsically tied to one another in the future and only resolved until the U.S. pork and poultry issues are agreed to by both sides.

Botswana Citrus Market Access – Draft Pest Risk Assessment (PRA): APHIS technical staff continues the internal process of reviewing and consolidating the 17 comments received during the open public comment period from October 3, 2024, thru January 3, 2025. The “next steps” in the formal USDA and APHIS regulatory/approval process will be to communicate with the Botswana national plant protection service (NPPO) to share the final pest list derived from the APHIS pest risk assessment (PRA) and then develop a risk mitigation document or RMD to stipulate how these pests will be mitigated for commercial citrus shipments exported to the United States. I have also sought additional clarification from APHIS to determine if APHIS will consider this petition to fall under what is known as USDA's “Fruit & Vegetable Streamlined Rulemaking.” In 2007, USDA published an innovative regulation (USDA - 7 CFR 318 & 319) that would allow certain fruits and vegetables to be imported into the U.S. should specific certification and/or inspection criteria be met. This regulation is important because it helps reduce the time needed to publish a final USDA rule where anywhere between 6 months to over a year may be saved from the “regular” USDA rule making process.

I also am working with the US-Africa Trade Desk (USATD) staff based in Orlando, Florida to collaborate and help prioritize access for Botswana with USDA, U.S. Department of State-Bureau of African Affairs, and USTR officials. USATD is focused on assisting African farmers/producers/exporters and U.S. importers/retail-supply chains facilitate agricultural trade. For example, USATD and Prosper Africa helped the South African Grape Association negotiate a \$156 million business arrangement last November 2024.

In the case of Botswana, USATD would like to open gain access before the end of this season to take advantage of a number of potential business agreements including several of U.S. retail chains such as Walmart where they wish to import approximately 313 containers into the Walmart chain.

USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Releases March 2025 Report- U.S. Citrus Forecast for 2024/25 Season:

NASS released their March report on the 11th that showed Florida production was up via grapefruit production but relatively unchanged from the February report. In general, California and Texas were down slightly overall in comparison to the February forecast. During the last 10 years, California has seen a 13% drop in Navel orange acreage and a 26% dip in Valencia acreage. However, California mandarin-tangerine variety acreage has made up this loss by seeing the most growth and now accounts for 70,000 acres out of 109,000 total acres in all-citrus production. The 3-state citrus producing states highlights for March are as follows:

Florida:

All-Orange: Florida all-orange production was up 1% from February at 11.6 million boxes vs. the 11.5 million forecast in February. However, this projection is still significantly lower than the 2023/24 harvest of 17.96 million cartons produced which is a 35% reduction from last season. An overly optimistic projection was forecast of 15 million boxes for this 2024/25 season.

Non-Valencia Production: The projection is up 2% from the February forecast, from 4.5 million boxes to 4.6 million in March. Nearly all of the early and mid-season non-Valencia rows, excluding Navels, are harvested. During the 2023/24 season, 6.76 million boxes were produced.

Valencia Production: Remains unchanged from last October at 7 million boxes but down 22% from the early seasonal forecast of 9 million boxes. Harvest is still in the early stages. During the 2023/24 season, 11.2 million boxes were produced.

All Grapefruit Production: Good news with a 9% increase from February to 1.2 million boxes versus 1.1 million boxes last month. Approximately 93% of the grapefruit has been harvested. 1.79 million boxes were produced last season.

Lemon Production: Unchanged from January and February with 600,00 boxes forecast.

Tangerine & Mandarin Production: Unchanged from February at 300,000 boxes. 450,000 boxes were produced during the 2023/24 season.

California:

All-Orange Production: A slight drop from February from 47.4 million boxes to 46.5 million in March. 47.5 million boxes were produced during 2023/24.

Non-Valencia Production: No change at 39 million boxes from the December thru February forecasts. 38.2 million boxes were produced during the 2023/24 season.

Valencia Production: A big drop from 8.4 million boxes in February to 7.5 million in March. 9.3 million boxes were produced in 2023/24.

All-Grapefruit Production: No change from January and February at 3.7 million boxes but a slight drop from the 4.2 million box forecast in December. 4.3 million boxes were harvested in 2023/24.

Lemon Production: No change at 26 million in March from the December-February forecast. 24.6 million boxes were produced during the 2023/24 season.

Tangerine & Mandarin Production: No change in March at 25 million boxes produced from the December-February forecast. California produced 27.4 million boxes in 2023/24.

Texas:

All-Orange Production: Unchanged at 900,000 boxes in March from the January and February projections. 1.18 million boxes were produced in 2023/24.

Non-Valencia Production: No change at 600,000 boxes in March from January and February. 690,000 boxes were produced during the 2023/24 season.

Valencia Production: No change at 300,000 boxes in March from January and February but a large drop from 450,000 boxes projected in December. 490,000 boxes were harvested during the 2023/24 season.

All Grapefruit Production: Unchanged at 2.5 million boxes in March from January and February. Note that 2.4 million boxes were produced during 2023/24.

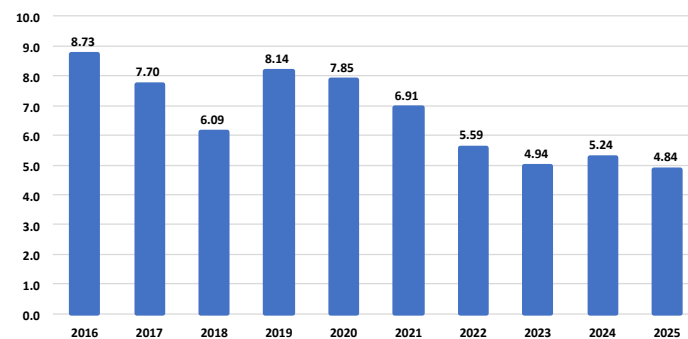
Arizona:

Lemon Production: No change at 900,000 boxes in March from the December thru February forecasts. 950,000 boxes were produced last season.

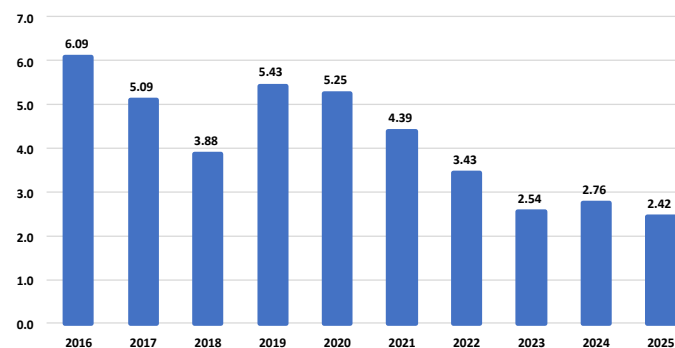
U.S. Total Citrus Production (1,000 Tons) USDA-NASS

	2,421
All Oranges	↓ 1.3
% Change from Previous Estimate	↓ 12.2
% Change from Previous Season	
Non-Valencia Oranges	1,793
% Change from Previous Estimate	↑ 0.2
% Change from Previous Season	↓ 3.7
Valencia Oranges	628
% Change from Previous Estimate	5.4
% Change from Previous Season	↓ 30.0
Grapefruit	299
% Change from Previous Estimate	1.4
% Change from Previous Season	↑ 13.1
Lemons	1,103
% Change from Previous Estimate	NC
% Change from Previous Season	↑ 7.9
Tangerines	1,017
% Change from Previous Estimate	NC
% Change from Previous Season	↓ 9.0

All U.S. Citrus Production - Million Tons



All U.S. Orange Production – Million Tons



The USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has estimated the following share of U.S. citrus production by state:

1. California: 78%

2. Florida: 18%
3. Texas & Arizona: 4%

Australia Reports 1st Detection of *Citrus Leprosis Virus C2 (Cilevirus colombiaense)* in Waxflower:

Scientists from Australasian Plant Pathology reported that CLV was cultivated in waxflower (*Hoya macgillivrayi*) plants that exhibited ringspot and chlorotic mottling. Molecular analyses confirmed that the causal agent was *Citrus Leprosis Virus C2*. This is the 1st report of CLV in Australia and the 1st report of CLV infecting waxflower.

Australia remains concerned that CLV can infect other plants including *Citrus spp.* *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* (shoeblackplant), *Passiflora edulis* (passion fruit), and *Swinglea glutinosa* (tabog). CLV has been detected in Colombia and the U.S., where it is reported in Hawaii. The mite, *Brevipalpus yothersi*, a known vector of CLV is present in the United States but Australia is currently free of this vector.

Reference: Chao, H.-Y., R.G. Dietzgen, J.E. Thomas & A.D.W. Geering. 2025. First report of the hibiscus strain of *Citrus Leprosis Virus C2 (Cilevirus colombiaense)* infecting *Hoya macgillivrayi* in Australia. Australasian Plant Pathology 54(1):33-35. Last accessed March 20, 2025, from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13313-024-01016-z>.

Trump Administration Tariffs Will Most Likely Affect U.S. Agriculture & Food Prices:

The National Business Capital media services (NationalBusinessCapital.com) investigated the vulnerabilities of a number of U.S. industries to foreign and domestic tariffs. Their report identified the mining and agriculture sectors as the most susceptible, while other service industries such as education, the arts, and retail trade are set to remain largely unaffected.

Although the report primarily focused on industry impacts rather than the effects on consumers, it is expected that increased costs and disruptions to supply chains will likely raise prices for consumers, at least in the short term.

The U.S. produces the majority of its own food but also imports over 10% of the commodities used in the agricultural industry. This reliance makes domestic agriculture much more vulnerable to reciprocal tariffs than many other sectors, which will most likely lead to price increases.

Both Canada and Mexico face 25% tariffs beginning on April 2 but notably, the U.S. depends heavily on Mexico for tomatoes, avocados, peppers, and various fruits and vegetables. The U.S. also imports beef, pork, soft-wood lumber, and canola oil from Canada which is also significant. China has faced tariffs from the 1st Trump Administration and besides Canada and Mexico, Mr. Trump is also looking at applying tariffs to the European Union.

These tariff moves cause quite a bit of uncertainty within the market and a major shift from the free trade policies espoused by both Democratic and Republican Administrations for at least the last 50 years. The Trump Administration believes in “reciprocal trade” which they believe will bring a more favorable balance to the United States. Critics believe that tariffs are nothing more than a “consumer tax” that will increase food prices and raise the possibility of an economic recession. Some economists worry that instead of a recession, the tariffs could lead to an even worse “stagflation” period which the U.S. has not seen since the 1970s.

