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Promoting market access for South African agriculture

FOREWORD

Welcome to the hundredth and second (102nd) issue of the Trade Probe publication coordinated by the Trade Research Unit under the Markets and Economic Research Centre (MERC) of the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC). The Trade Probe publication is co-produced by the NAMC and the Department of Agriculture (DoA). The focus of this issue is on leveraging China's zero-tariff policy for African countries, as it is set to mark a major shift in Asia-Africa trade dynamics. As the world's second-largest economy, China's market liberalization presents significant new opportunities for South African agricultural products, ranging from fresh produce to processed goods. Beyond China, other Asian economies are expanding trade relations with Africa through bilateral and regional agreements, preferential market access, and agro-industrial partnerships.

This issue explores how South Africa may diversify and expand agricultural trade into Asia, with a focus on (i) commodity-specific trade trends, (ii) tariff and non-tariff barriers, (iii) trade policy innovations, (iv) regional value chains, (v) food safety and SPS compliance, as well as (vi) bilateral or multilateral trade arrangements. The authors identified agricultural commodities of their choice and analysed their export performance over the past year. Strategies and trade arrangements to expand the trade of South Africa's agricultural products are also explored.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT IS AS FOLLOWS

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1. An analysis of China as a Growth Frontier for South African Macadamia Exports
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3. What the plums & sloes' access to the Chinese market means for South African farmers

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CONTRIBUTORS

Mr. Buhlebemvelo Dube | Mr. Bhekani Zondo | Mr. Thabile Nkunjana | Dr Solly Molepo | Dr Siphe Zantsi

China as a Growth Frontier for South African Macadamia Exports

Buhlebemvelo Dube

1.1 Introduction

Macadamia nuts are one of the key agricultural products that South Africa exports to the international market. The export value of fresh or dried macadamia nuts (shelled) is approximately $161 million, and $134 000 for the (in-shell) nuts (ITC, 2025), with shelled nuts accounting for a larger share. South Africa is the number one exporter of in-shell nuts in the world and in Africa, its strong export footprint in the international market is increasingly facing trade exposure due to numerous trade shocks fuelled by rising market access barriers in the form of tariffs and non-tariff measures (NTMs). Tariffs or customs duties are financial charges in the form of a tax imposed on merchandise imports, and they tend to give a price advantage to similar local goods and raise revenue for governments, as market access is conditional upon the payment of the customs duty, whether specific, ad valorem, or mixed tariff forms. NTMs, on the other hand, can take the form of quantitative restrictions and may be applied in the context of prohibitions, restrictions, or quotas. Amid rising market access barriers, one of the most strategic opportunities for macadamia exporters is the recently announced free trade protocol with China for African countries. China's zero-tariff policy presents export opportunities that can be leveraged to unlock the massive Chinese markets.

1.2 Analysis of market access expansion for South African macadamia in the Chinese market

China`s zero tariffs under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a voluntary preferential trade platform that can enable trade expansion amid shrinking opportunities in traditional markets. Such trade initiatives are guided by the "Enabling clause" under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and can be implemented as a series of non-reciprocal preferential trade agreements on goods exported (Zhina & Omoruyi, 2021). This policy promises to make market access much more predictable and liberal. WTO principles such as the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and national treatment help drive trade to be non-discriminatory. The MFN principle tends to prohibit discrimination between imports irrespective of their origin or destination, while the national treatment principle prohibits discrimination between imported and locally produced products (WTO, 2025). Therefore, China's initiative to implement a zero-tariff based on

WTO principles provides a platform that can enable South African macadamia producers to effectively grow their income, boost demand, expand production and exports, and contribute to higher employment in the industry.

China is the second largest importer of macadamia nuts (shelled), HS code (080262) in the world, with a staggering import value of $43.4 million, following the United States of America (USA), which leads with an import value of $96.5 million (ITC, 2025). Furthermore, China is the leading importer of macadamia nuts (In shell), HS code (080261) in the world, with an import value of $249 million, followed by Vietnam, with an import value of $32 million. Moreover, the import value of in-shell macadamia for China has grown by 15% per annum between 2020 and 2024, and by 40% per annum growth in imported quantities in the same period. This upward trajectory is underpinned by a strong demand for macadamia nuts in China, and South Africa is well-positioned to fill this demand, considering that South Africa is the leading exporter of macadamia nuts (In shell) with an export value of $133 million, followed by Australia with an export value of $82.9 million (ITC, 2025). South Africa`s annual export growth value between 2020 and 2024 is 6% per annum (p.a), and its growth in quantity for the same period has been a modest 10% p.a. This growth has been underpinned by continuous investment by the industry towards research and development, as well as growing partnerships between private and public stakeholders (SAMAC, 2025). South African macadamia (in-shell) nut exports to the Chinese markets have grown significantly over the years from $35 million in 2020 to $127 million in 2024, as depicted in ***Figure 1*** below. This has been shaped by strong demand from China and ample supply from South Africa, making these partners dominant players in the global macadamia nut trade.

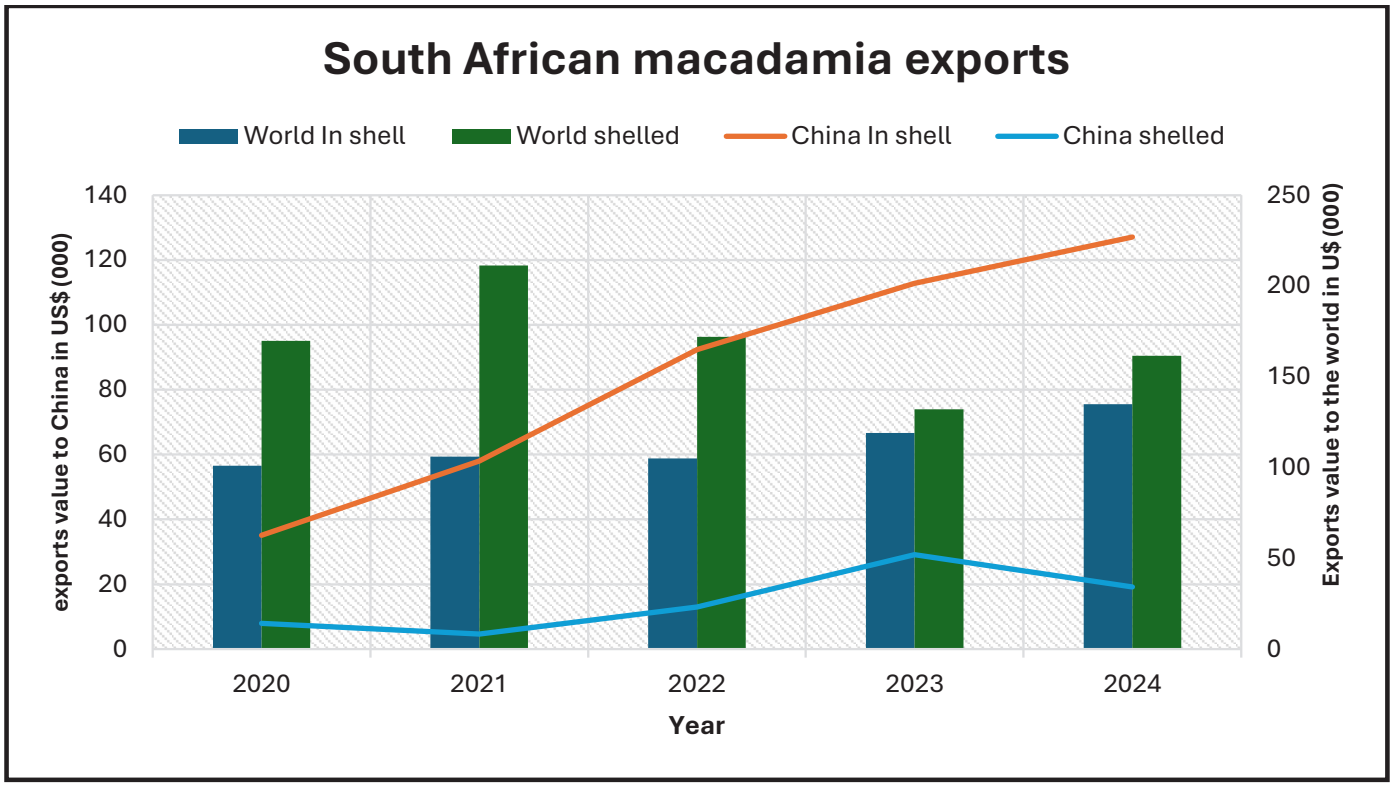

Figure 1: SA macadamia exports between 2020 and 2024

Source: Authors` calculations based on ITC data

South African macadamia can benefit by looking towards the Chinese markets and capitalizing on the current wave of market access opportunities, without losing traditional markets. This would cushion producers from future trade shocks. ***Figures 2 and 3*** illustrate the leading importers of macadamia nuts from South Africa, which points to the strong demand in China.

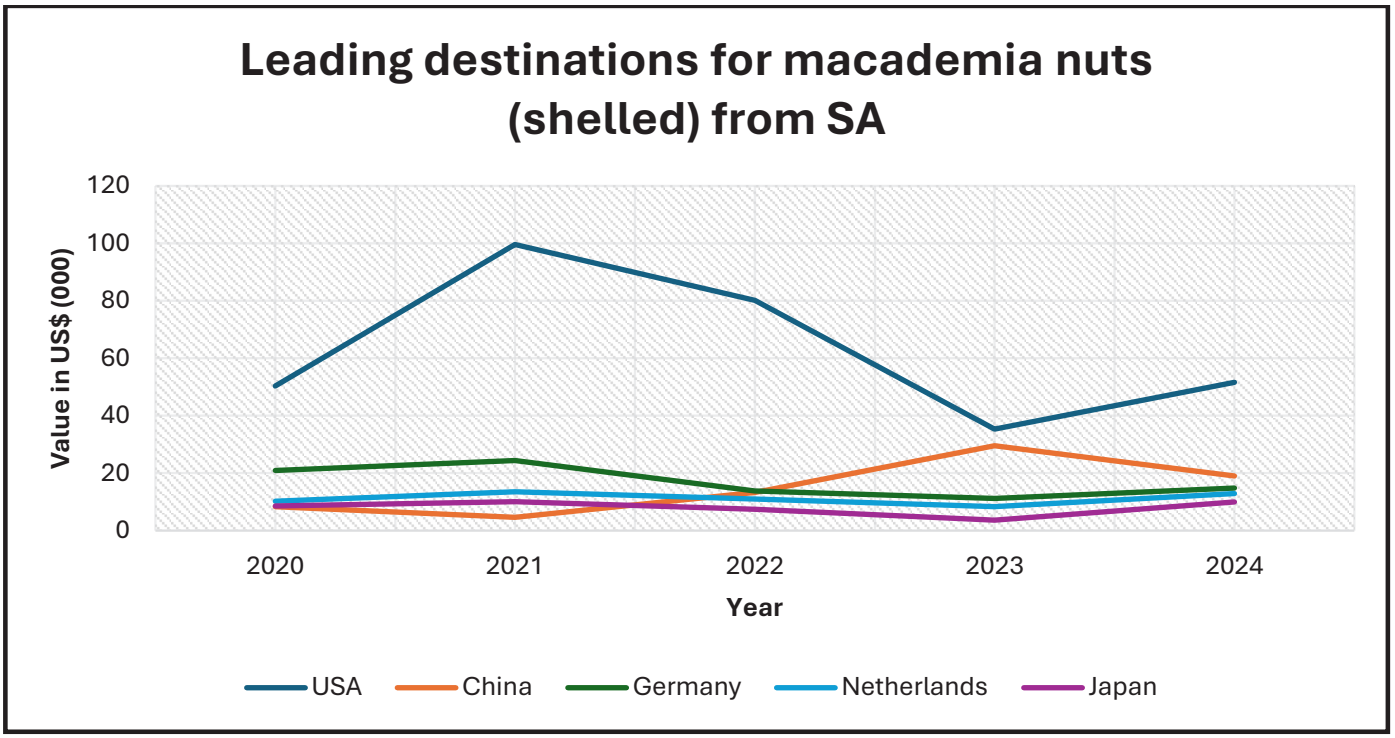

Figure 2: South Africa`s top export destinations for macadamia nuts

Source: Authors` calculations based on ITC data

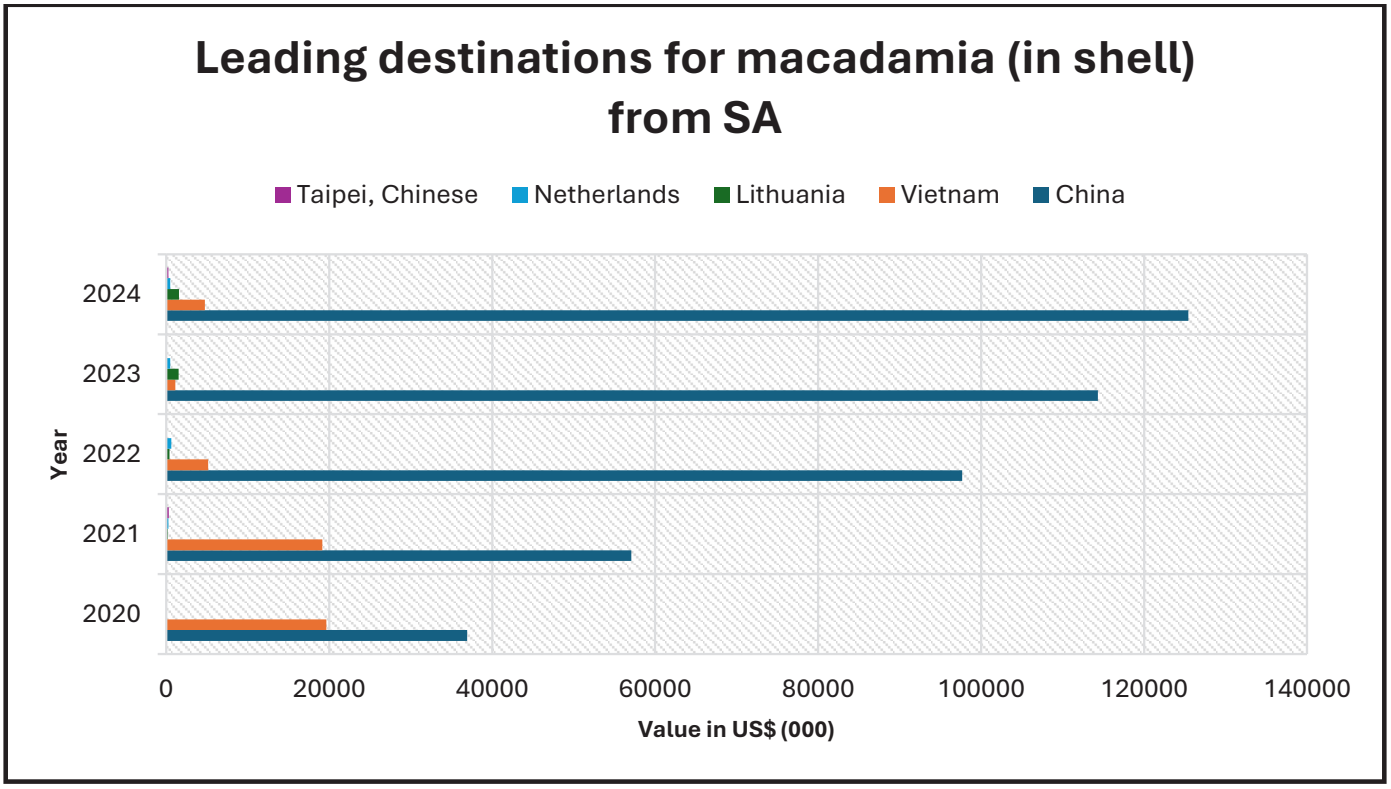

Figure 3: South Africa`s top export destinations for in-shell macadamia

Source: Authors` calculations based on ITC data

1.3 Conclusion

Agricultural trade is crucial in safeguarding global food security during temporary or protracted food deficits which may result from adverse climate-related conditions or any other conditions in global markets. It is through trade that consumers access affordable and nutritious food globally. However, when there are rising barriers in the international trade landscape, food security is threatened, and thus, China`s zero-tariff policy is a positive step towards safeguarding food security, and it also presents real gains for macadamia exporters in South Africa. Despite NTMs that may still be an obstacle, there is much to be gained from such a policy direction and also by consolidating strategic partnerships with the Chinese market, especially during uncertain trade environments in the world. It is clear that market diversification is a need, and this approach can be done without losing traditional macadamia markets. Diversification is a vital approach that cushions trade shocks in an increasingly unpredictable and volatile trade landscape.

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Rising global trade protectionism: To what extent can South Africa expand its agricultural trade in Asia?

Bhekani Zondo

2.1 Introduction

South Africa's agricultural trade is currently subject to uncertainty in one of its key markets, the United States (U.S.), following the imposition of a 30% reciprocal tariff by the U.S. government on all commodities destined for this market. Similar to several other countries, South Africa is subject to the U.S. reciprocal tariffs, which are intended to balance bilateral trade deficits between the U.S. and its trading partners. The rising global uncertainty threatening South Africa's export growth has ignited calls for market diversification. As a member of the World Trade Organization, South Africa has done tremendously in expanding its export footprint, gaining market access to over 181 countries globally. This has largely contributed to the robust export growth of South Africa's agricultural products over the past three decades.

2.2 Market analysis

In 2024, South Africa's agricultural exports reached a new record of $13.7 billion, recording a year-on-year (y/y) growth rate of 4% from a record $13.2 billion in 2023 (Trade Map, 2025). This is equivalent to a 34% increase over the past five years, from a value of $10.3 billion in 2020. The African continent maintained its position as South Africa's major export destination for agricultural products with a share of 44% of exports, followed by Asia (21%), the European Union (19%), Middle East (8%), the United Kingdom (UK) (7%), and America's (6%) with the U.S. specifically accounting for a share of 4%. The Asian aggregation is one of the regions increasingly poised to providing export growth opportunities and cushioning South Africa's agriculture exports from rising risks of protectionist sentiments in markets like the U.S., especially with fast-growing economies like China

offering prospects of liberalization trade to several African countries including South Africa. Therefore, this article aims to analyse South Africa's agricultural trade performance with the Asian region and outline export opportunities for the key commodities bound to lose market competitiveness in the U.S. market due to the 30% reciprocal tariffs. ***Figure 4*** below illustrates South Africa's agricultural trade performance with the Asian countries over the past decade.

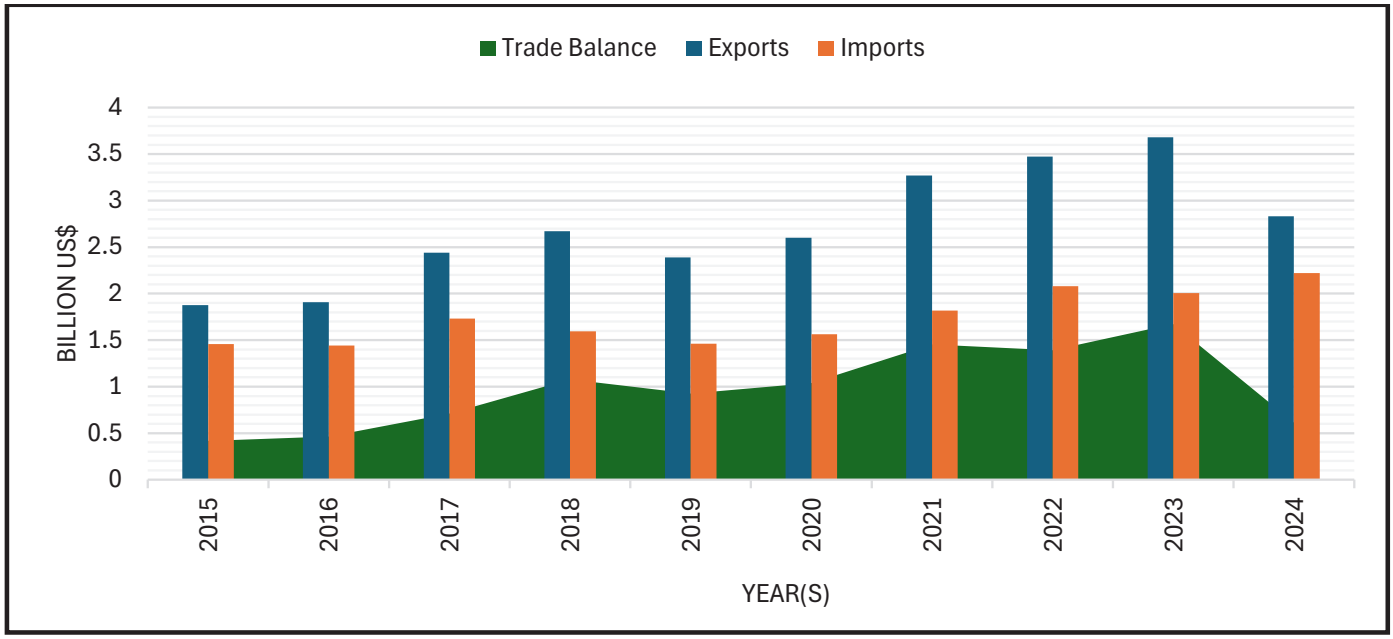

Figure 4: South Africa-Asia agricultural trade performance between 2015 -2024

Source: Trade Map (2025)

South Africa's agricultural trade with Asia has grown remarkably by over 51% over the past decade, with exports expanding from about US$1.9 billion in 2015 to US$3.7 billion in 2023, although declining to US$2.8 billion in 2024. This steady upward trajectory underscores Asia's growing importance as a destination for South Africa's high-value agricultural products. According to trade statistics from International Trade Centre Trade Map (Trade Map, 2025), in 2024, oranges accounted for the largest share of 11% of exports destined for Asia, followed by apples (9%), wool (7%), soft citrus (i.e., mandarins, tangerines, etc.) (6%), nuts (5%), macadamia nuts (5%), raw cane sugar (4%), among others. Whereas the leading export destinations were China, accounting for a share of 26% of South Africa's agricultural exports to Asia followed by the United Arab Emirates (19%), Malaysia (7%), Saudi Arabia (6%), Japan (4%), and India (4%), among others.

Despite the observed growth in South Africa's agricultural exports, imports have also increased drastically by approximately 50%, from a value of US$1.5 billion in 2015 to US$2.2 billion in 2024. The leading products sourced from Asia are rice (28%), palm oil (22%), apple juice (4%), animal offal's (4%), nicotine products (3%), and palm kernels (2%), among others (Trade Map, 2025). On the other hand, Thailand is currently the leading source market for South Africa's agricultural imports from this region with a share of 24% in value terms, followed by China (23%), Indonesia (18%), India (13%), and Malaysia (11%), among others. Although imports from Asia have surged, the robust export growth has ensured a positive trade balance between South Africa and Asian countries. Agricultural trade balance increased by 47% from approximately US$417 million to US$611 million during the period under consideration.

Figure 5 depicts potential export opportunities for South Africa's agricultural products, distinguishing between baseline exports (actual exports) and unrealised export potential (untapped export opportunities) in Asia. The analysis considers the top ten agricultural products that are likely to lose market share in the U.S.; these are oranges, soft citrus, wine, macadamia nuts, ice cream, table grapes, raw cane sugar, apple juice, dried fruits, and raisins.

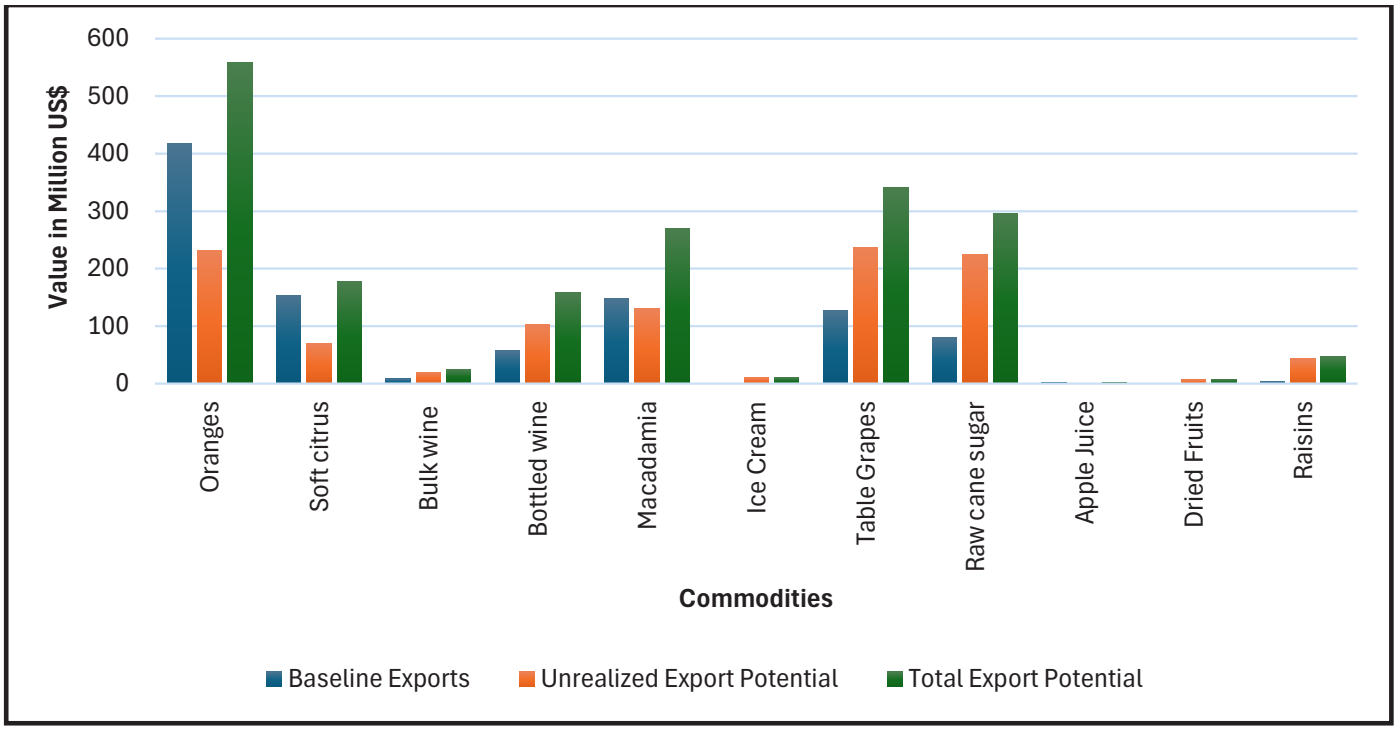

Figure 5: Potential export opportunities for South African agricultural products in Asia

Source: Market Access Map (2025)

The results shows that South Africa has managed to penetrate the Asian markets for commodities such as soft citrus, macadamia nuts, and oranges, with actual exports accounting for over half of the total export potential to this region. South Africa's export of oranges to the Asian region possesses an export potential worth a value of US$559 million with an unrealized export potential of US$231 million. Table grapes currently lead with the highest unrealized export potential worth US$236 million followed by raw cane sugar (US$225 million), macadamia nuts (US$131 million), bottled wine (US$103 million), and soft citrus (US$69 million). Other commodities with notable unrealized export potential although relatively lower, are raisins (US$44 million), bulk wine (US$22 million), ice cream (US$11 million), dried fruits (US$7.1 million), and apple juice (US$645 000).

2.3 Conclusion

South Africa's agricultural trade prospects in Asia present a significant opportunity to diversify exports and mitigate the risks posed by rising global protectionism. The region's fast-growing economies, expanding consumer base, and appetite for high-value agricultural products create a lucrative market for South Africa to expand its share and unlock substantial unrealized export potential. This calls for strengthening trade relations with key growing economies such as China, the UAE, Malaysia, and India. Key priority commodities for strategic market diversification include oranges, table grapes, macadamia nuts, raw cane sugar, soft citrus, and wine, which present high unrealized export potential. Lastly, successful market diversification efforts will involve intensifying trade negotiations around the hefty tariffs and non-tariff barriers, which are mainly prevalent in these markets.

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For South African farmers, what does the plums & sloes' access to the Chinese market mean?

Thabile Nkunjana

3.1 Introduction

China imports more plums and sloes than any other country in the world, with its imports rising from R59.4 million in 2005 to at least R5.8 billion in 2024. ***Figure 6*** shows the value of China's imports of sloes and plums in Rand from 2005 to 2024. Global imports of plums and sloes were valued at R26.1 billion in 2024, according to trade map data, with China being the largest importer with a share of 22%, or R5.8 billion. These markets were responsible for 36% of global imports in 2024, or R9.4 billion, when combined with Hong Kong, whose imports were R3.5 billion in 2024, or 14% of global imports (Trade map, 2025).

3.2 Chinese market analysis

Like other stone fruits, South Africa's plum and sloe business is facing comparable concerns such as logistical issues and climate change, amongst others. Another major problem facing plums and sloes is declining profitability, which has put a great deal of strain on South African farmers (Hortgro 2021). The future of the sector is uncertain because of these circumstances, which have caused financial losses for many farmers. Notwithstanding the difficulties, South Africa's export volumes of plums have recovered in the 2024–2025 season, with a considerable rise in plum shipments. The Chinese market for sloes and plums is examined in this article. The article specifically examines the Chinese market considering South Africa's agreement to gain access to it.

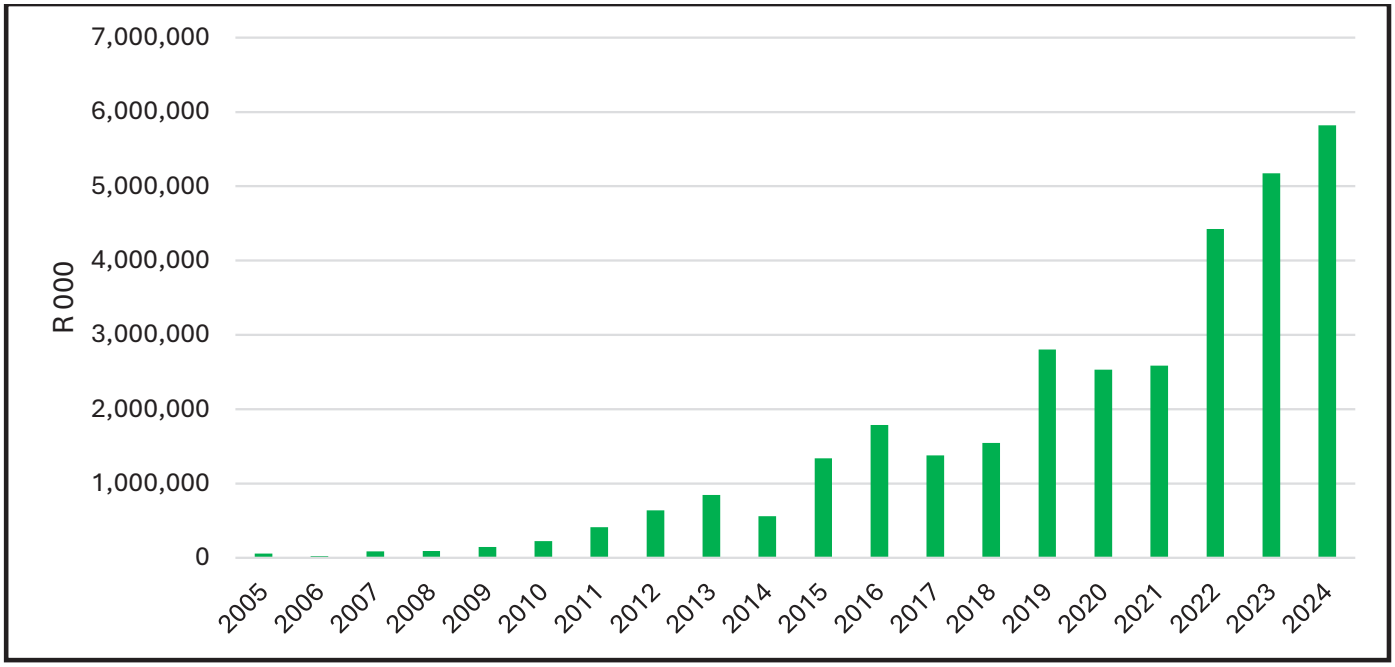

Figure 6: China's plums and sloes imports from 2005 to 2024 in value (Rand)

Source: Trade map, 2025

The main months for China to import plums and sloes are January through May. According to trade map data, China imported an average of R854.1 million worth of plums and sloes every month between January and May of 2025. After May, plum and sloe imports start to decline to negligible levels. From 2016 to 2024, the top suppliers of plums and sloes to China are shown in ***Figure 7*** by percentage share in Rands. ***Figure 7*** below makes it abundantly evident that Chile is the primary provider of plums and sloes to the Chinese market; of China's R5.8 billion in 2024 imports, Chile provided 93% of them, or R5.4 billion. Chile accounted for 65% of China's imports of plums and sloes throughout the investigated period in 2016, and this percentage rose noticeably over time to 93% in 2024. Australia witnessed a slight increase from 0% in 2016 to 5% in 2024, while the United States saw a sharp decline from 31% in 2016 to 2% in 2024. High tariffs from the 2018 trade war, fierce competition from countries like Chile, and interruptions in international supply chains could all be contributing factors to this reduction. The countries or areas shown in the figure below are South Africa's rivals for the Chinese plum and sloe market.

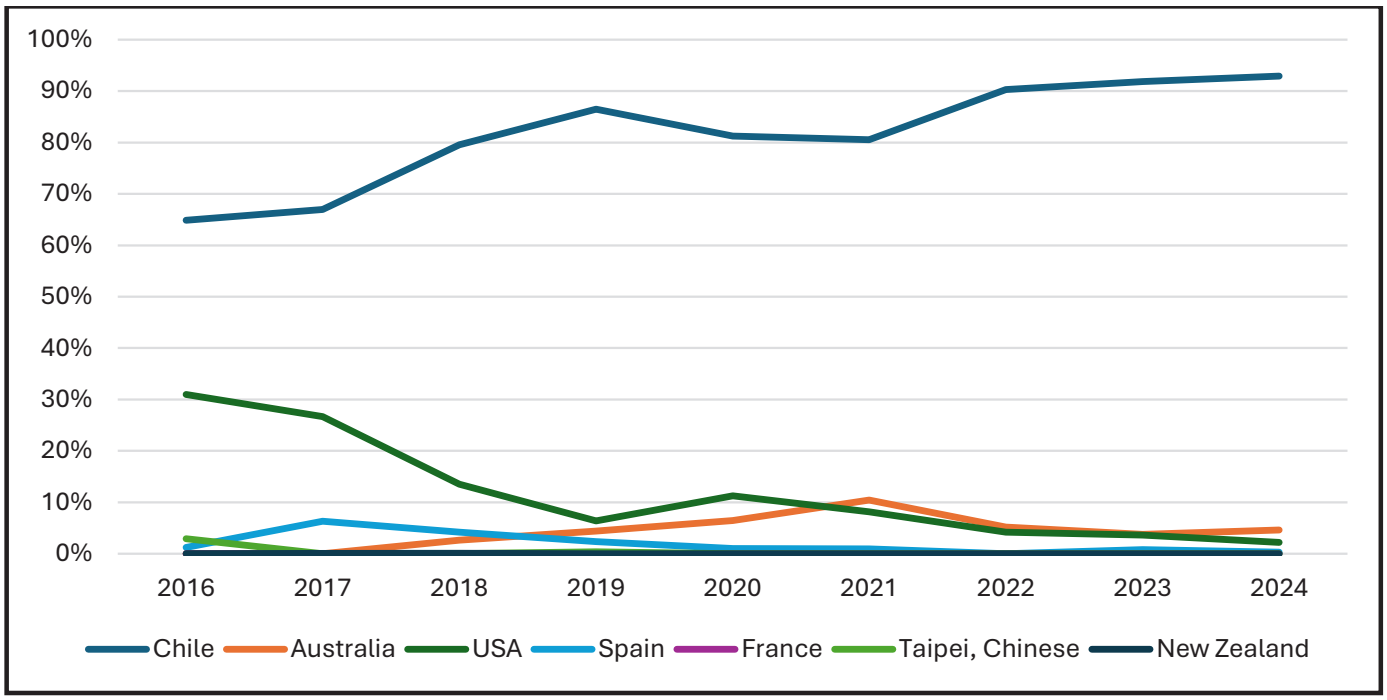

Figure 7: China's plums and sloes

Source: Trade map, 2025

In Figure 8, the value of South Africa's plum and sloe exports by month is displayed. In contrast to peaches and nectarines, South Africa's plums and sloes are ready for the market several weeks before Chinese imports of plums and sloes hit the shelves. More significantly, this is before Chile's and Australia's plums and sloes start to enter the Chinese market, but Spain and the USA export to China in November and December each year the same time as South Africa plums and sloes are being exported.

The world's supply of South Africa's plums and sloes typically peaks in December and then starts to decline in January. However, China does import nearly all year long, but small amounts outside the January-May period, while South Africa exports negligible amounts of sloes and plums to the rest of the world throughout the year after March. South African farmers of these fruits might fetch premium prices considering supply and demand factors.

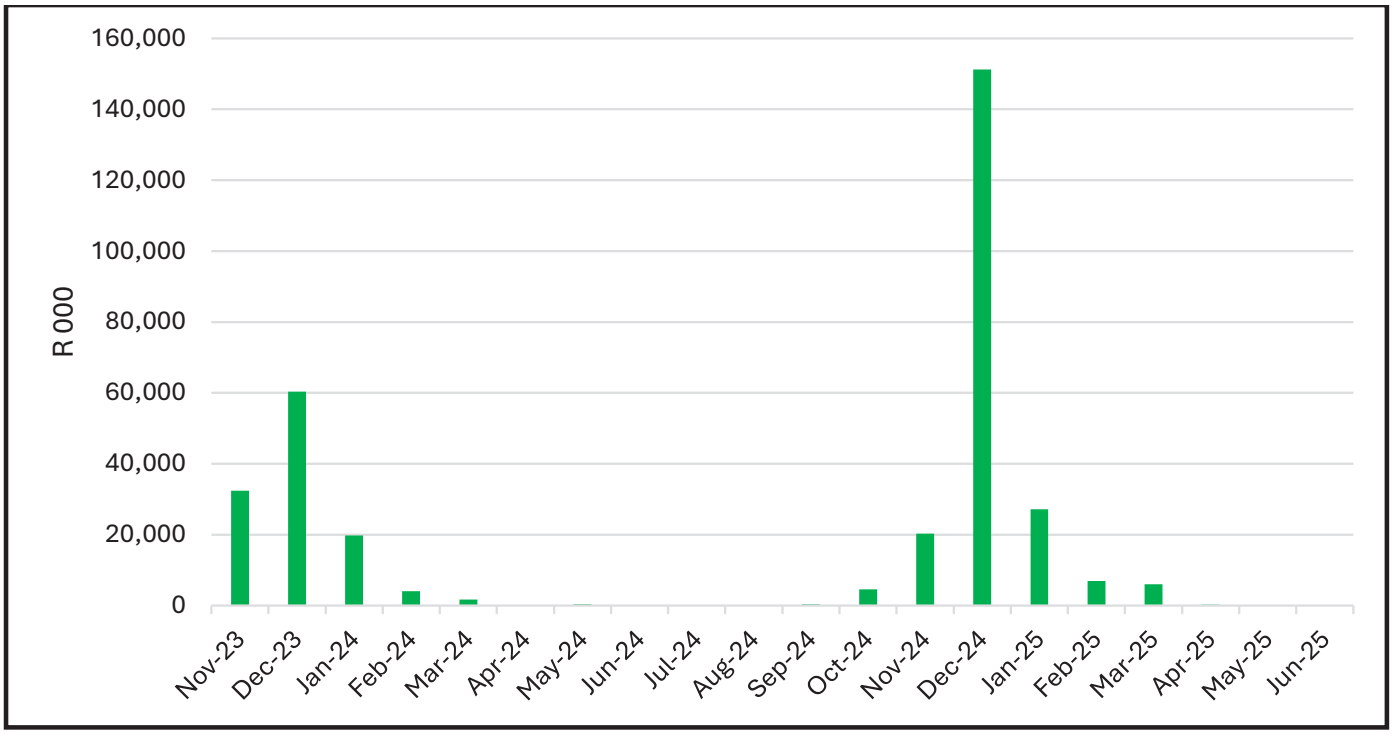

Figure 8: South Africa's plums and sloes exports from 2005 to 2024 in value (Rand) by months

Source: Trade map, 2025

3.3 Conclusion

The Chinese market presents a great potential for South African farmers and various agribusinesses. Access to the biggest market in the world for plums and sloes will undoubtedly help many farmers who grow these fruits and, of course, aid in product diversification, which the South African government is actively promoting following the trade shock caused by the 30% tariff that the US government placed on South African products. Apart from the Chinese markets, diversification to other export markets should be broadened and deepened.

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Opportunities for diversifying South African avocado exports into the Asian markets

Dr. Solly Molepo

4.1 Introduction

Avocado farming in South Africa focuses primarily on domestic consumption and exporting to various destinations. Production is mainly centered in the warm subtropical regions of Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces in the Northeast, with some cultivation in Kwa-Zulu Natal, where cooler temperatures occur due to its more southern location. A variety of key avocado types can be harvested over an extended timeframe because of the climate differences across these areas. This regional diversity allows the industry to supply avocados from late February through early November, with most of the harvest taking place between late February and early September. This article explores the potential effects of the potential opening of the Asian market to the South African avocado industry.

4.2 Market access opportunities for Avocadoes in Asia

In 2024, South Africa exported more than 50% of its avocados, while the remainder was sold domestically through the fresh produce markets and the remaining portion distributed informally to retailers as well as hawkers. The total production was 157,590 tons, which is 1,7% increase from 154,949 in 2023 (SAAGA, 2025). ***Figure 9*** shows that 51% of the South African avocados are destined for export markets; 17,3% is sold at the national fresh produce markets; 12,7% is channelled to the National Fresh Produce Markets; 10,9% is destined for the retail market; 5% is for processing of oil and 2,7% is sold for processing for guacamole.

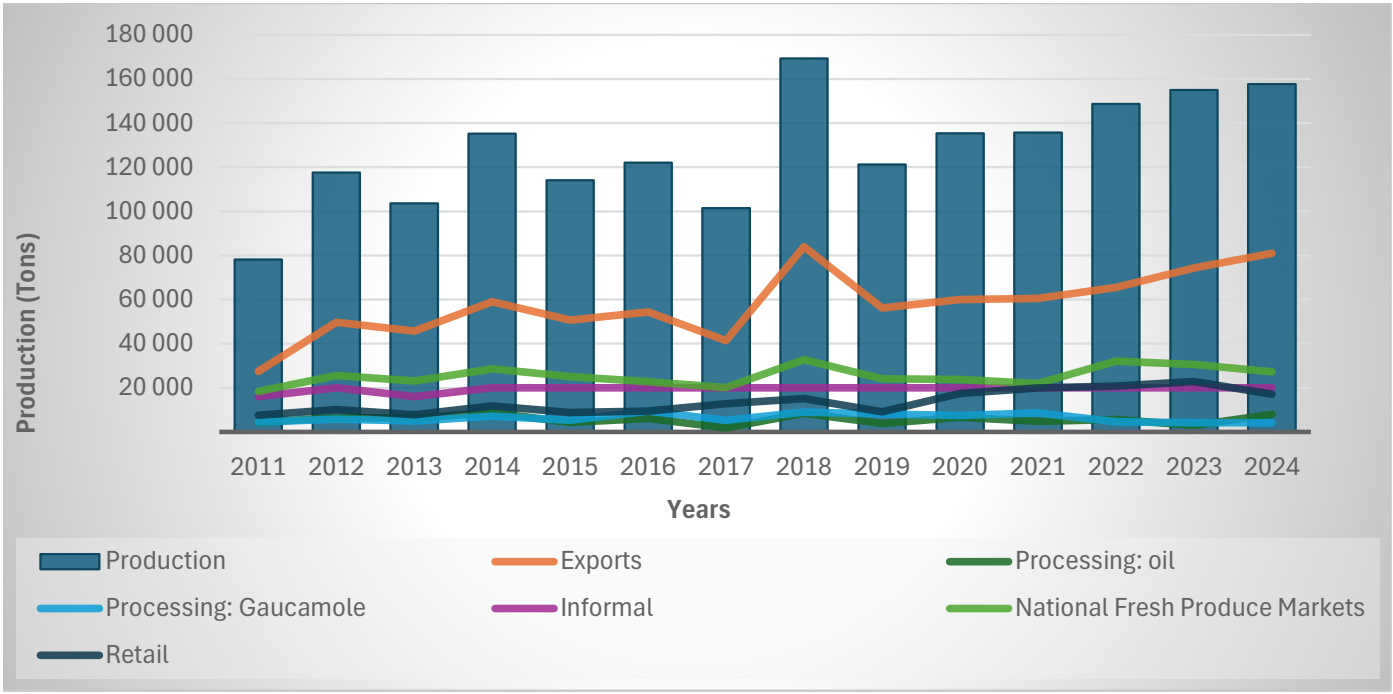
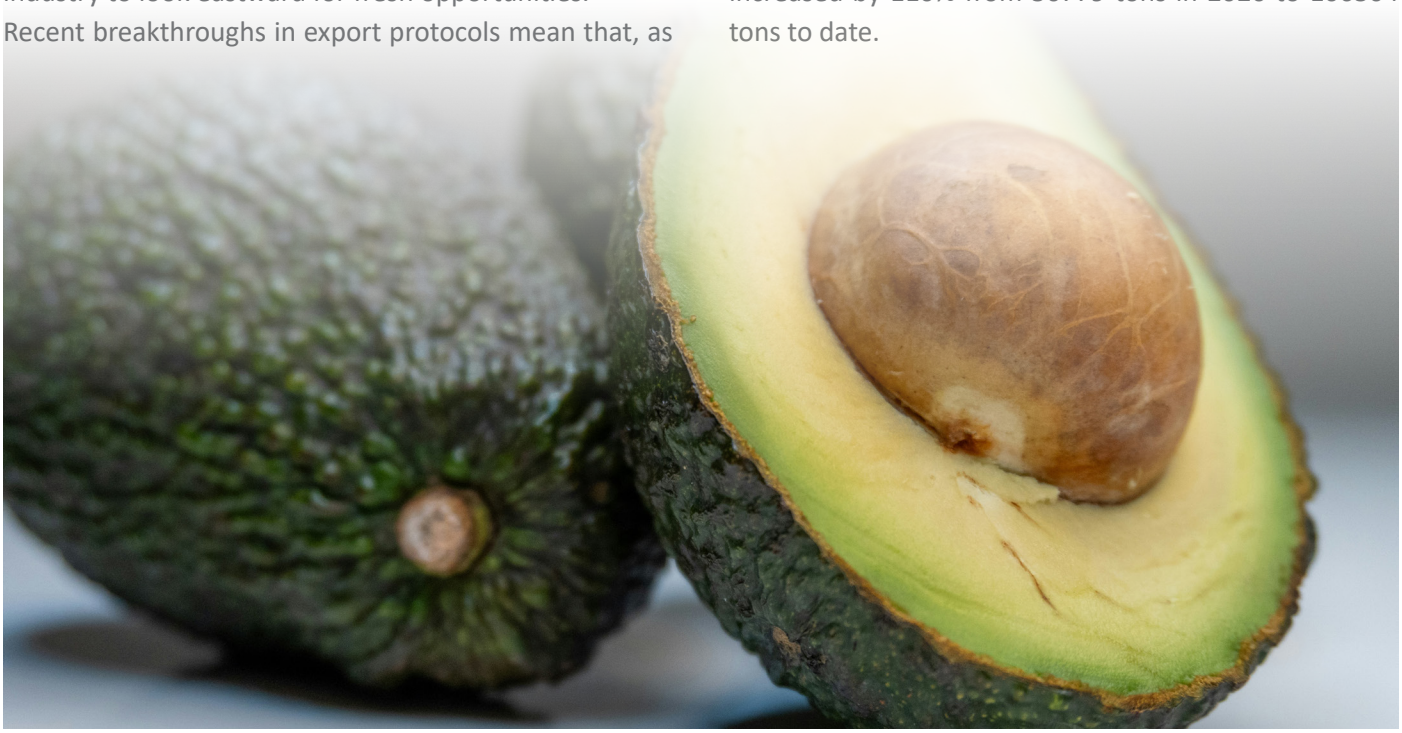


Figure 9: Annual production of avocados in South Africa

Source: South African Avocado Growers Association, 2025

South Africa's avocado industry stands at the threshold of an exciting new chapter, one defined by increasing access to fast-growing Asian markets and a shift towards global diversification. While Europe and the United Kingdom have historically dominated as the primary export destinations for South African avocados, market saturation and growing competition have prompted the industry to look eastward for fresh opportunities.

Recent breakthroughs in export protocols mean that, as of 2024 and 2025, South African avocados have secured entry into three major Asian markets: **China, Japan, and India.** Together, these countries imported avocados worth $289 million in 2024, presenting substantial growth potential for South African exporters. ***Figure 10*** reflects the imports of avocados from Africa and the world in metric tonnes. The Asian imports from Africa increased by 110% from 50779 tons in 2020 to 106504 tons to date.



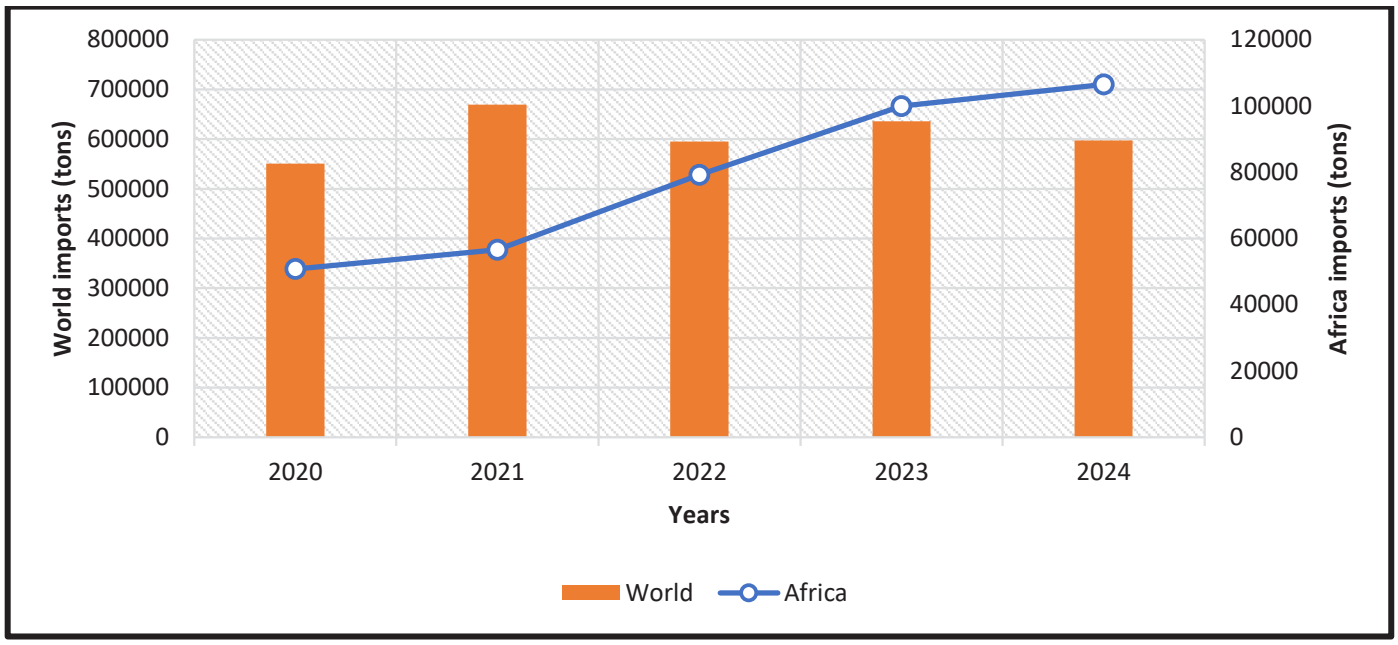


Figure 10: Asia's imports from Africa and the World

Source: International Trade Centre, Trade Map

South Africa boasts several competitive advantages in Asian markets:

- Shorter Shipping Times: Relative proximity allows South African avocados to reach Asian ports faster than competitors from Latin America, meaning fresher fruit and reduced costs.
- Counter-Seasonal Supply: The Southern Hemisphere harvest enables South Africa to fill market gaps when other major suppliers, like Peru and Mexico, are out of season.
- Quality and Innovation: The South African industry has invested in research to modernize packhouses and improve sustainable production practices, further enhancing the appeal of the product.

4.3. Market-Specific Insights

4.3.1 China

Gaining access to the Chinese market is a transformative milestone for South African avocado growers. China's growing upper-middle class and a strong trend toward healthy eating are fuelling demand for "superfoods" like avocados. Although South Africa's initial shipments to China represented just a fraction (0.03%) of total exports in 2024, industry leaders expect volumes to rise as supply chains mature and as consumers become familiar with the fruit. Experts note that South Africa can position itself as a reliable supplier, thanks to advantages in shipping time and the ability to offer fresh, large-sized avocados during windows of high Chinese demand.

4.3.2 Japan

Japan represents another premium market with stringent import protocols and a taste for high-quality produce. The South African government and industry recently celebrated approval for direct avocado shipments, with the first containers dispatched in 2024. Due to South Africa's seasonal complementarity with Japan's main suppliers, such as Mexico and Peru, South African avocados can compete directly and fill crucial supply gaps.

4.3.3 India

Following new phytosanitary agreements, India also now permits South African avocado imports. With a vast population and a rapidly growing middle class, India is expected to drive steady demand growth in the coming years. South African exporters, have already delivered their first Hass avocados, leveraging early harvesting and shipping advantages to reach Indian consumers before principal competitors.

4.3.4 Other Asian Markets

Countries such as South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore are experiencing a boom in

avocado consumption, driven by health trends, culinary innovation, and a more youthful, urban demographic. South Africa's diverse avocado varieties and varied harvest windows allow exporters to tailor offerings to suit a range of consumer preferences across the region

4.3.5 Opportunities

- Market Diversification: Expanding into Asia decreases reliance on Europe, creating stability and reducing vulnerability to price swings or trade disruptions.
- Rising Asian Demand: The shift in diet and increasing disposable income are expected to keep Asian avocado demand on a sharp upward trajectory.
- Brand and reputation management: South Africa's reputation for sustainable, premium-quality produce lends itself to strong country-of-origin branding, which can command higher prices in discerning Asian markets.
- Value-Added Products: Beyond fresh fruit, there is scope for processed and packaged avocado products to tap niche markets throughout Asia.

4.4. Conclusion

South Africa's access to Asian countries represents not just additional export volume, but a strategic realignment towards markets with explosive growth potential. By leveraging its geographic advantages, investment in quality, and adaptive marketing strategies, South Africa is well-positioned to become a reliable supplier of avocados in Asia and to diversify its export portfolio for a resilient, prosperous future.

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Strategic Trade Expansion into Asia: Leveraging Zero-Tariff Opportunities for South African Hemp

Dr. Siphe Zantsi

5.1 Introduction

Tariffs remain a significant barrier for many exporting countries rising geopolitical tensions.. Zero-tariff arrangements therefore present a golden opportunity—especially with major economies like China, which a massive market due to the country being highly industrialised and densely populated.

5.2 Expansion opportunities

The strategic trade expansion into China is therefore a promising opportunity for South Africa. On the one hand China's industrial hemp market was valued at USD 970.12 million in 2023 and is projected to reach USD 6,703.50 million by 2032, growing at a CAGR of 23.9%(Chandwade, 2025) This surge is driven by increasing global demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products across various industries. On the other hand, South Africa has a promising cannabis industry, albeit still in its early stages. "Cannabis" is an umbrella term comprising three main categories: recreational cannabis (commonly referred to as marijuana or dagga), medicinal cannabis, and industrial cannabis—also known as hemp, which is the focus of this article. Hemp contains only trace amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive compound responsible for the "high" associated with marijuana.

In 2021, hemp was declared an agricultural crop under the Plant Improvement Act (PIA), No. 53 of 1976 (National Department of Agriculture, 2021). This act regulates the import and export of selected plants and propagating material, while maintaining their quality and ensuring

their agricultural and industrial utility. According to the National Department of Agriculture, over 1,100 hemp permits have been issued to prospective producers. However, only a small portion of these permit holders have begun cultivation. During nationwide hemp training sessions conducted by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and the Department of Agriculture, 20% of farmers had started planting. The main reasons for this hesitation included: limited access to seeds (though ARC varieties have now been registered and will soon be available), insufficient production knowledge (which was addressed in last year's training), and lack of market access.

Industrial crops like hemp cannot be sold informally through street vendors or hawkers. Instead, securing an off-take agreement before planting is key. Such agreements ensure market security and allow farmers to meet specific buyer requirements from the outset. At present, only a few companies offer these agreements, and many are located far from the areas where potential producers reside. Most hemp permit holders are in the former homelands of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo.

To grow the hemp industry, a reliable market is essential. When farmers are assured of buyers, they are more likely to invest in production initiatives. There is a strong demand for hemp from China. However, the few South African companies that are exporting hemp are unable to meet this demand due to low production volumes especially within their operational radius. These are the types of businesses that need targeted government support to resolve market access challenges. Since the locations of permit holders are known from the information gathered when one applies for a cultivation permit, efforts should be made to develop markets within a 100 km radius of these producers to minimise transaction costs and boost participation.

5.3 Conclusion

Initiatives that expand market access are powerful tools for rural economic empowerment. A compelling example is the communal wool industry. Around 25 years ago, wool had little commercial value in communal areas such as the former homelands. The turning point came when the Department of Agriculture partnered with the National Wool Growers Association (NWGA) to improve the genetic quality of communal sheep flocks and to build shearing sheds.

As a result, formally marketed communal wool in the Eastern Cape increased from 222,610 kg in the 1997/1998 season to over 5 million kg by 2017/2018. Today, communal farmers contribute 13% of South Africa's national wool clip . Notably, China is the largest importer of South African wool. The wool industry offers a blueprint for developing South Africa's cannabis sector, particularly hemp.

The impressive figures cited in the Cannabis Master Plan, which President Ramaphosa has referenced in several State of the Nation Addresses, can only be achieved through collaborative stakeholder engagement—just as we saw with the wool success story. These discussions must be prioritised in the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan.

Wool Growers Association | Farmer Management | Sheep Farming | NWGA

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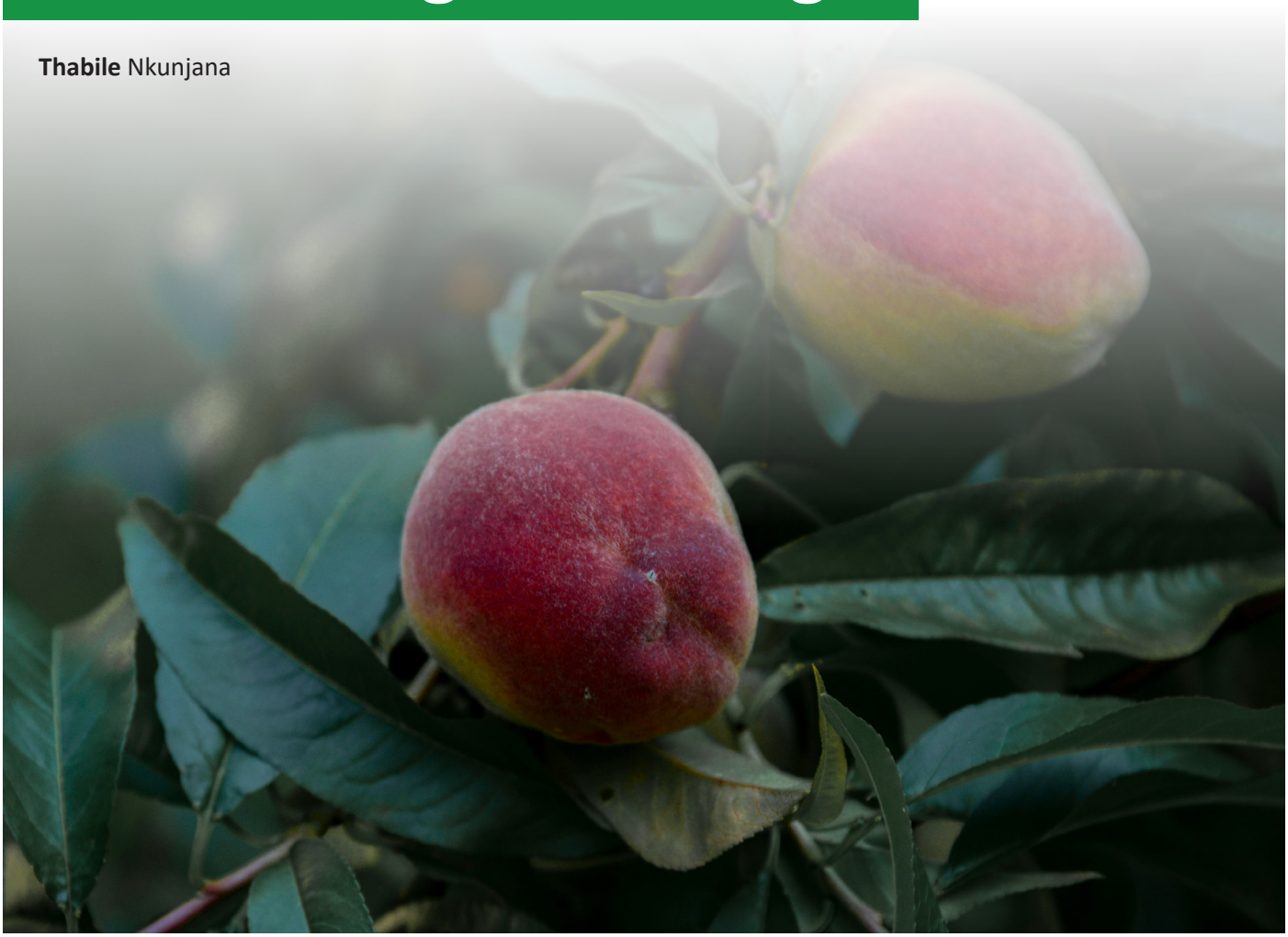
South Africa's peaches and nectarines' access to the Chinese market is a game-changer

Thabile Nkunjana



6.1 Introduction

One of the significant agricultural sectors that was developed in the Western Cape area of South Africa is the peach and nectarine industry. The fresh fruit export sector receives the least amount of the industry's fruit, while large amounts are processed into canned peach products because the available cultivars were better suited for canning, the canning sector dominated the industry (Tsvakirai, not dated). Since the canneries were located near the producing area and did not incur additional expenses for marketing or fruit transportation, the canning industry also offered a more structured and profitable distribution channel.

6.2 Potential opportunities for peaches and nectarines

The South African peach and nectarine sector has had difficulties throughout the years, such as varying export numbers, disruptions caused by bad weather, and inefficiencies at the various ports. During the 2023–2024 season, farms and port operations experienced delays and disruptions due to extreme weather occurrences such as storms, fog, and strong winds. A recent agreement between South Africa and China to sell peaches and nectarines was revealed by the Minister of Agriculture. Based on data from the trade map, this means that South African farmers would now have access to the seventh

(7th) largest peach and nectarine market in the world. This article examines South Africa's nectarine and peach exports to the global market, the leading peach and nectarine supplier to China, and the changes in the Chinese market over the last few years. The value of China's imports of peaches and nectarines from 2017 to 2024 is shown in ***Figure 11*** (Rand). Imports of Chinese peaches increased dramatically during this time, rising from R331.5 million in 2017 to R2.0 billion in 2024, a 532% increase. This increase could be a sign that China has some demand for peaches, which now would be beneficial for South African growers.

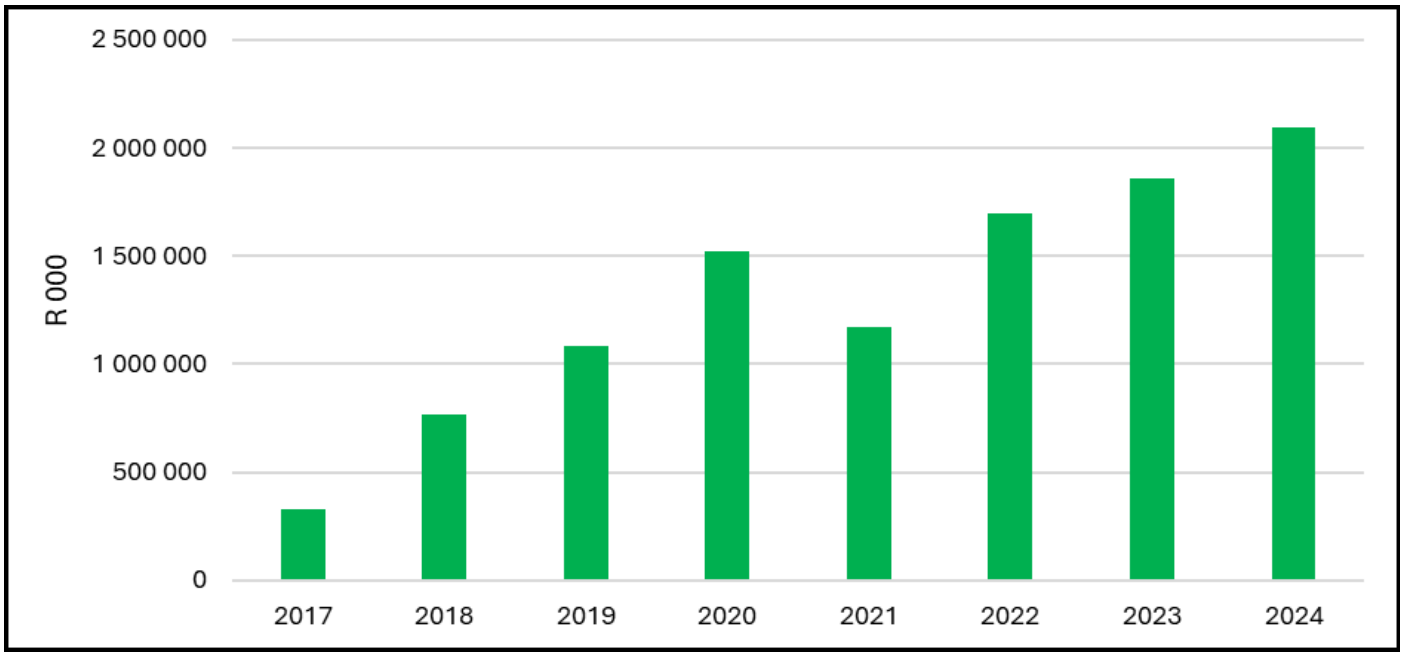


Figure 11: China's peaches and nectarines imports from 2017 to 2024 in value (Rand)
Source: Trade map, 2025

China's peach and nectarine imports in months and the top suppliers

Spain and Turkey are the world's top and second-largest exporters of peaches and nectarines, respectively, whilst Chile ranks third in terms of value. ***Figure 12*** depicts imports by China, and the top five (5) peach and nectarine suppliers to China from 2017 to 2024, broken down by percentage of value in Rands. Chile is the leading supplier of peaches, including nectarines, to the Chinese market, with a market value of R2 billion in 2024, according to trade map data. Its share increased from 45% in 2017 to 80% in 2024. Australia's supply share decreased from 32% in 2017 to 20% in 2024, but it remains the second-largest supplier after Chile. Spain's market share in the Chinese market, has fallen from 23% in 2017 to 0% in 2024, which could indicate that Chile has taken some of Spain's and Australia's market share as they both decreased over the observed period.

China imports peaches and nectarines primarily between November and May each year, however small amounts are imported during other months. ***Figure 12*** makes it evident that Chile and Australia are the most suitable countries for Chinese imports at this time, which may be explained by seasonality. Consequently, China imports more than 90% of its peaches and nectarines from these two nations each year.

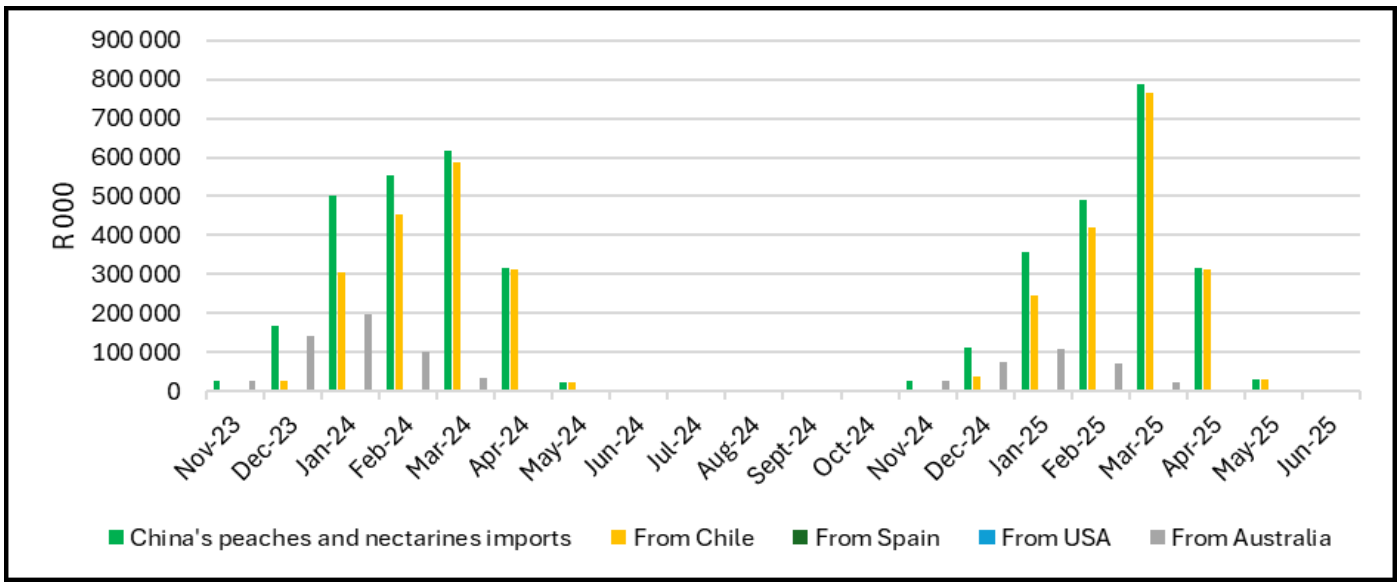


Figure 12: China's peaches and nectarines import in months and the top suppliers

Source: Trade map, 2025

The South African peach and nectarine exporters to the world by month

South Africa is amongst the world's 10 top producer of peaches and nectarines, coming in at number 9 in 2024 (USAD, 2025). South African peach and nectarine exports to the global market are shown by months in ***Figure 13***. South Africa's exports of peaches and nectarines to the global market have grown significantly during the last five years, from R603.0 million in 2020 to R1.0 billion in 2024. This was a 72% gain. The present markets in which South Africa sells its peaches and nectarines, including the UK, Netherlands, UAE, Canada, and Botswana, are responsible for this increase in exports. South Africa faces direct competition from Chile and Australia's peaches and nectarines. However, the rise in imports from China indicates that there is space for more of these products, which would help South African farmers and expand the sector.

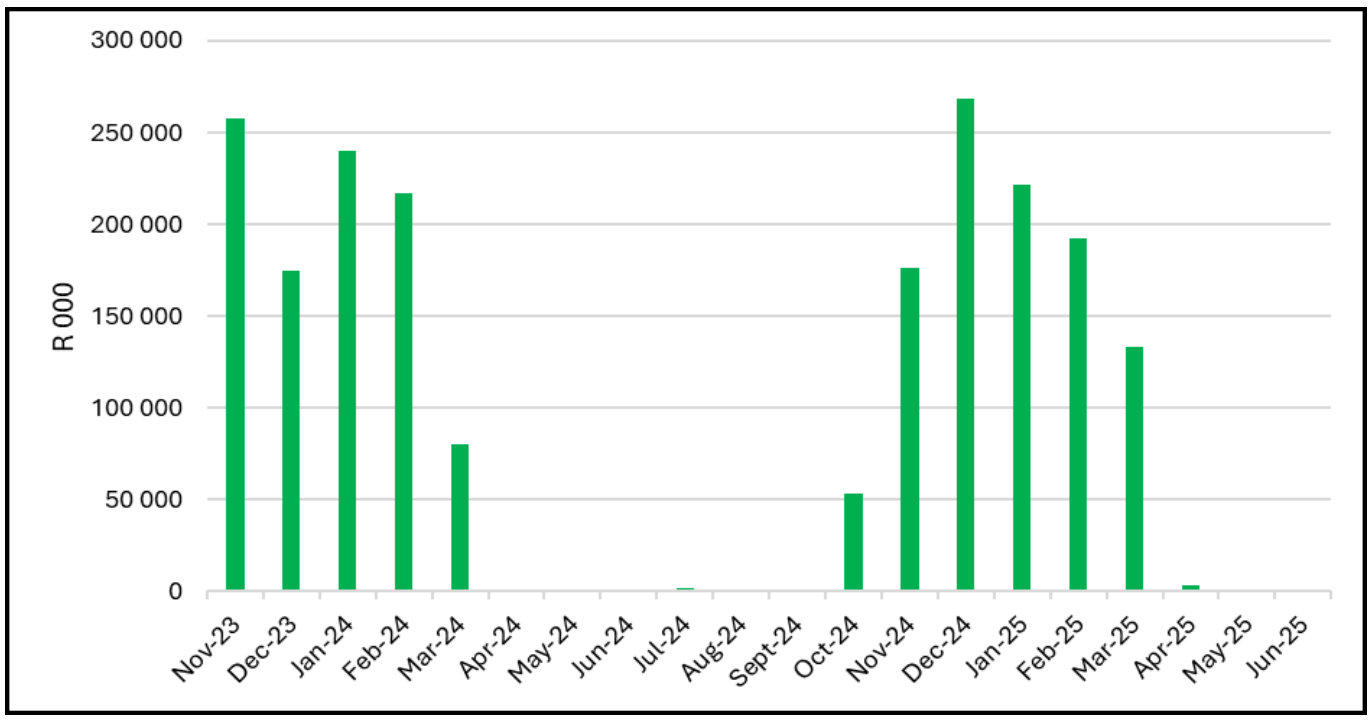


Figure 13: South Africa's peach and nectarine exports in months per season

Source: Trade map, 2025

5.5 Conclusion

South African farmers and exporters have a fantastic opportunity thanks to their access to the Chinese market. With one of the world's largest middle-class populations, China presents a fantastic opportunity for peach and nectarine production to expand and possibly create additional jobs. The rivalry between Australian and Chilean farmers, however, shouldn't be taken for granted. Efficiency in the Port of Cape and other supporting facilities will be necessary to assist these products reach the Chinese market and compete; otherwise, it will be challenging to compete with countries like Chile and Australia.

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Agriculture on South African farmers' US exports performance for second quarter

Available at: *https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/agriculture-south-african-farmers-us-exports-performance-second-quarter-18*

"The South African agricultural sector has demonstrated remarkable growth and resilience in the face of significant global trade headwinds, Agriculture Minister John Steenhuisen noted as recent data show South Africa's exports have not only remained competitive, but have increased in the second quarter of 2025 to US$161 million, up by 26% from the same period in 2024. "However, it is important to examine this performance with a forward-looking perspective. The recent imposition of a 30% tariff on our exports by the United States (US) has brought to light the urgent need to diversify our export markets and enhance our competitiveness to mitigate the economic impact of losing preferential trade access."

Minister Steenhuisen says the results of the second quarter of 2025 also highlight how urgent it is to resolve the ongoing tariff talks with the US. "Our capacity to gain steady, long-term access to this important market continues to be a top priority," he adds. The figures speak for themselves. In the first quarter of 2025, South African agricultural exports to the US were US$118 million, up by 19% year-on-year. "This growth is not merely a statistical anomaly, but a reflection of a bountiful harvest, a surge in high-quality produce, and the efficient operation of our ports. The products leading this charge include a variety of fruits such as citrus, grapes, apples and pears, as well as nuts and wine. As we continue to engage in diplomatic negotiations and work towards a more favourable trade agreement, the focus remains on ensuring that our farmers and exporters can continue to thrive in the global marketplace, securing the future of our agricultural sector," Minister Steenhuisen emphasised.

DG Okonjo-Iweala welcomes calls of support for WTO, urges meaningful MC14 outcomes

Available at: *WTO | 2025 News items - DG Okonjo-Iweala welcomes calls of support for WTO, urges meaningful MC14 outcomes*

"Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala welcomed recent calls of support for the WTO and the multilateral trading system from world leaders and urged members to show the political will and flexibility to achieve meaningful outcomes at the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in March 2026.
The Director-General delivered her remarks at a 30 September meeting of the WTO's Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) which she chairs."

The WTO's evolving agenda is strategically pivotal for South African agriculture, with MC14 outcomes poised to influence the global rules that determine our sector's competitiveness and market access. Strengthening the multilateral system's predictability directly supports export growth in key commodities, while negotiations on domestic support, market access, and food security offer a critical opening to shape fairer subsidy disciplines and advance national priorities under the Agricultural and Agro-processing Master Plan. The emerging joint proposal by the African and Cairns Groups further enhances South Africa's leverage to align global trade rules with continental development goals.

At the same time, progress on fisheries subsidies and targeted measures for vulnerable members can bolster smallholder participation, coastal economies, and climate-resilient food systems. Seizing this moment requires South Africa to lead proactively, positioning itself not only as a beneficiary but as an architect of the next phase of global agricultural trade governance.

Frontloading, measured responses cushion tariff impact in 2025 but risk high for 2026

Available at: *https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news25_e/tfore_08aug25_e.htm*

"World merchandise trade is now projected to grow 0.9% in 2025, up from the -0.2% contraction forecasted in April but down from the 2.7% estimate pre-dating the tariff increases. The upgrade is mostly due to frontloading of imports in the United States, WTO economists said in a forecast update released on 8 August. However, higher tariffs over time will weigh on trade, bringing next year's expected trade volume growth down to 1.8% from 2.5% previously. Global trade turbulence presents both peril and opportunity for South Africa's agriculture. The WTO's revised forecast of 0.9% growth in 2025 is driven by Asia, where rising demand aligns with South Africa's comparative advantage in citrus, macadamias, and wine. Yet this silver lining is tempered by headwinds. Europe has slipped into negative trade momentum, while frontloaded US imports and looming tariff corrections threaten to depress global commodity prices through 2026. For South African agriculture, the macroeconomic backdrop is equally complex."

A weaker dollar may strengthen the rand, squeezing export margins, while falling oil prices lower production costs but shrink demand from energy-dependent African partners. The deeper risk lies in tariff uncertainty itself, which undermines investment, disrupts supply chains, and creates scope for rivals such as Chile and Australia to capture market share. To navigate this landscape, South Africa must act strategically. Diversification into high-growth Asian markets is imperative, supported by stronger regional value chains and reinforced preferential trade agreements.

Input cost relief should be reinvested in productivity, logistics, and climate resilience to offset volatility in prices and exchange rates. Above all, the sector must embrace adaptability: in a world where policy shocks ripple instantly across borders, South Africa's agricultural competitiveness will depend less on reacting to global uncertainty and more on pre-empting it with foresight, diversification, and institutional agility.

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