



## Treatment of citrus black spot reviewed

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A scientific review of the pest risk assessment for 'citrus black spot' (*Guignardia citricarpa*) infection as a result of imports from southern Africa has rejected the South African authorities' contention that 'the climate in the EU is unsuitable for the establishment of *G. citricarpa*'. The scientific panel convened by the European Food Safety Authority found that citrus black spot, a common fungal infection on citrus fruit, which has never established itself in the EU but which is common in many other regions, could 'survive transport, storage and existing pest management procedures ... and may be transferred to suitable hosts by means of splash dispersal from citrus black spot-infected citrus fruit and peel'. The review thus concluded that citrus black spot may enter producing areas in the EU via infected citrus fruit. It held that 'The South African documents do not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the importation of citrus fruit from infested areas is a very unlikely pathway for the introduction of *G. citricarpa* into these areas'.

Currently four options exist for pest risk management:

- allowing imports from a pest-free country (this could not apply to South Africa);
- allowing imports from pest-free areas ('effective in principle but requiring intensive continuous controls');
- allowing imports from areas where there are no symptoms in the field of production (however this is not fully effective, since it depends on the intensity of field inspections);
- applying appropriate field treatments (but this is 'insufficiently effective', since treatment does not 'fully prevent or eliminate fruit infections').

The panel concluded on the basis of the 'frequent interceptions of [South African] consignments of citrus fruit infested with *G. Citricarpa* ... that the existing risk management options are not sufficient to prevent the entry of *G. citricarpa*' (the cause of citrus black spot). It further concluded that 'phytosanitary inspections and interceptions at all points of entry to the Community are appropriate in order to protect the citrus fruit growing areas'. This is in line with current EU practice.

In terms of alternative risk management options the review observed that 'the combination of pre-harvest (field) treatments with post-harvest treatments would further reduce, but not eliminate the risk of introduction', but noted that 'despite routine application of post-harvest treatment of citrus fruit by South Africa, frequent interceptions of infested consignments occur at the Community points of entry'. The review therefore recommended:

- 'an investigation of the exact causes for infested consignments' arrival at the EU border despite applied mitigation measures in South Africa';
- that 'methods to accelerate citrus black spot symptoms development, combined with a standardised sampling scheme, could be applied in a pre-entry quarantine system to improve the detection of infested consignments before shipping';
- the 'demarcation of endangered and non-endangered areas ... combined with distinctive measures regarding end use and distribution of citrus fruit, that are less restrictive'.

The scientific panel's review of South Africa's representations on the citrus black spot issue needs to be seen in the context of Spanish industry pressures in mid-February 2008 to halt citrus imports from South Africa (and *de facto* Swaziland), following the detection of citrus black spot on deliveries to Spain

### Sources

EFSA, December 17th 2008

[http://www.efsa.europa.eu/cs/BlobServer/Scientific\\_Opinion/Summary\\_plh\\_o...](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/cs/BlobServer/Scientific_Opinion/Summary_plh_o...)

efsa.europa.eu, press release, January 22nd 2009

[http://www.freshplaza.com/news\\_detail.asp?id=37176](http://www.freshplaza.com/news_detail.asp?id=37176)

### Editorial comment

The issue of the treatment of citrus black spot is important to small-scale citrus exporters such as Swaziland, where the destruction of a single consignment due to citrus black spot infection on a single orange can serve to eliminate any profits which may be made on citrus exports. The panel's recommendation for the demarcation of endangered and non-endangered areas, linked to the introduction of distinctive measures based on end use and geographical destination within the EU, could potentially reduce these commercial risks by allowing the more targeted marketing of Swazi citrus exports to particular geographical markets and specific end users.

Such measures could remove the disincentive to the development of ACP citrus exports to the EU, which have arisen from the treatment of EU27 countries as a single geographical area for pest control purposes, following the completion of the single internal market. Previously the commercial risk of citrus black spot on citrus exports to the UK – a non-citrus growing area – were much lower, since only the infected fruit would be destroyed, and not the whole consignment.

The value of other measures, such as accelerating the development of citrus black spot symptoms and standardised sampling during quarantine, could be useful, but this would depend on the costs of such measures, which will be closely related to the volume of citrus products exported.

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