



## Tightening of Citrus Black Spot controls could pose challenges

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Press reports indicate that the EU is tightening up controls on the permitted incidence of Citrus Black Spot (CBS). It is reported that in future the EU will only allow "a maximum of five citrus black spot disease interceptions in a season". According to Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) of Southern Africa, "there hasn't been a season when we've had less than 12" interceptions. The new rules were described as "much harder", and producers consider that complying with them will be a major challenge.

The press reports indicate increasing pressure on the EC over this issue. On 11 March 2013, Spanish farmers' organisations called for strict EU controls on citrus imports from South Africa. On 18 March, the EU farmers' organisation Copa-Cogeca took up the issue, calling for the EC to immediately "put in place safety measures to protect against contaminated imports of citrus fruit... from South Africa" and to "restrict imports until the disease has been eradicated". Copa-Cogeca said that this move followed a warning from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) that "there was a high risk of importing the highly contagious disease ... from South Africa".

However, Mr Chadwick of CGA pointed out that the latest scientific findings suggested that "fruit is not a pathway for the introduction of CBS". He said that recent US decisions on imports from Uruguay "further [isolate] the EFSA's conclusion on the risk of CBS" infection, and bring into question "the appropriateness of EU measures."

In November 2011, the EU's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) published its report of an inspection visit to South Africa in June 2011 to assess 'citrus fruit for export to the European Union'. The report found that "the whole system of export checks has been improved and strengthened since the 2009 mission and reduces significantly the risk of introduction of CBS. All fruits originating from the same orchard found to be infested are now excluded from export to the EU." Nevertheless, South African citrus exporters will need to comply with the new standards, if access to the EU market is to be maintained.

South Africa has a highly competitive citrus industry. According to a USDA report in December 2012, "despite increased competition in global markets, [South African] citrus production and exports have been increasing as industry adopts varieties that are in demand globally and shifts to improved management practices to improve food quality". Following major foreign investment by companies seeking to meet growing market demand in the US, 2012 was a good export season for the South African industry. South African citrus exports to the US commenced in 2010, "following the USDA's recognition of several [South African] production areas as free of citrus black spot".

### Sources

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### Editorial comment

The process of tightening up of EU SPS controls is leading to a new collection of challenges for ACP horticultural exporters, including well-established suppliers such as those in South Africa and Kenya (see *Agritrade* article 'New EU MRLs hit Kenyan vegetable exports', 28 April 2013).

Ironically, the process of standards harmonisation – which is likely to be a key element of the proposed EU–USA FTA negotiations – could well bring some relief to ACP citrus exporters, if less stringent, yet scientifically supported, US controls systems are favoured over the more stringent EU control systems. Concerned ACP exporters' associations may well need to closely monitor the process of discussions around EU–US standards harmonisation that will be initiated as part of the wider EU–USA FTA process (see *Agritrade* article 'EU–USA FTA negotiations to be launched', forthcoming).

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