



Good progress reported in South Africa–China SPS dialogue in citrus and apple sector

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The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA), with the aim of increasing export opportunities for citrus and apple producers, is intensifying dialogue with the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) "on alternatives to the present cold sterilisation treatment, and to discuss operational and administrative issues related to the protocol". According to the CEO of the CGA, "AQSIQ is open to discuss alternative arrangements to cold sterilisation, provided that sufficient technical information is provided to satisfy them that pests of concern have been adequately dealt with." A technical working group is to be formed "to advance matters of mutual benefit", for example by not adding to the administrative work of AQSIQ officials, "who already have an extensive workload". South African citrus was first exported to China in 2004, followed by grape exports in 2006.

In terms of serving EU markets, where increasingly stringent social and sustainability requirements are being introduced for fruit and vegetable imports, the Sustainability Initiative South Africa (SIZA) "is gaining ground as a unifying body for fruit industry audits in South Africa". SIZA provides "an independent, legitimate and transparent national platform... through which compliance with labour standards can be measured and demonstrated by individual producers". SIZA audit procedures increasingly provide a basis to "differentiate non-compliant employers from the compliant". Where producing companies are found to be non-compliant, the industry-wide body Hortgro is committed to supporting members in taking corrective action.

Sources

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Editorial comment

Negotiating SPS protocols is a precondition for access to the Chinese market for a range of food and agricultural products. ACP countries have widely differing experiences of dialogue with the Chinese SPS authorities, which are themselves facing human resource constraints in dealing with all the market access dossiers pending.

Against this background, there may be some benefits to be gained from collective ACP action in establishing the SPS prerequisites for accessing the Chinese markets in the main sectors that are of interest to ACP agro-food exporters. Collective action for an organised dialogue at the ACP level could potentially ease human resource constraints faced by AQSIQ in dealing with pending dossiers, and thereby accelerate the process of SPS approval for ACP exporters.

In addition, the CGA's experience suggests that the Chinese authorities are open to dialogue with exporters about the basis for implementation arrangements to ensure that "pests of concern are adequately dealt with". Developing formalised arrangements for ACP-wide dialogue with the Chinese authorities on implementation issues, on a sector-by-sector basis, could assist ACP exporters in cost-effectively meeting Chinese SPS requirements, by promoting the generalised use of best practices across ACP exporting sectors.

With regard to the EU market, the experience of local sustainability certification being gained in South Africa under the SIZA programme could potentially provide a basis for the establishment of similar schemes in other ACP regions. This could potentially reduce the costs of sustainability certification for ACP exporters targeting EU markets, where such certification is becoming a prerequisite for market entry.

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