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Targeted restrictions placed on South African citrus exports

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Press reports indicate that following the eighth EU interception of a citrus consignment from South Africa infected with citrus black spot (CBS) this season, "shipments to the EU will be blocked from zones with the presence of black spot." This decision was taken following consultations between EU and South African officials, with South African officials proposing targeted export restrictions. The measure could affect up to two million boxes of citrus fruit.

Spain's Young Farmers' Association Asaja welcomed the move as an indication that the South African authorities and citrus industry "are willing to improve their level of plant health".

According to the CEO of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa, Mr Justin Chadwick, "packing for the EU will continue in parts of the Western Cape and the Northern Cape that are free of the disease." Citrus from areas where the infection has been found in consignments sent to the EU will be "redirected to Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe".

According to Mr Chadwick, citrus exports to the EU from Argentina have not been "subjected to the same limit of five detections".

In August 2013, a European citrus importer commented on the website *Freshfruitportal.com* that "demand for South African citrus has been strong." He said that "My clients need to have oranges. If South Africa is blocked, nobody will have oranges in Europe." The importer was exploring the option of "increasing imports from Argentina and Uruguay" – but reluctantly, since "the quality from South Africa is much better than from Argentina."

In August 2013 it was reported that uncertainty over future access to the EU market was leading some South African exporters to explore alternative markets. Some growers considered that "the dollar markets are paying quite well at the moment and the exchange rate is quite favourable." As a consequence, some exporters prefer to "send their fruit to the dollar-paying markets and sideline the risk of going to Europe". *Freshfruitportal.com* commented that "risk aversion has meant more interest [on the part of South African exporters] in the Far East, Middle East, Russia, Southeast Asia and Canada". In the absence of effective measures to find alternative markets, it was estimated by Intsika Agri Media that the EU action could cost the South African citrus industry some R3 billion (approximately €218 million) in lost earnings.

Following strong promotional campaigns, South Africa now exports around 40,000 tonnes of citrus annually to the US market.

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Editorial comment

The decision to introduce targeted restrictions on exports of South African citrus in response to exceeding the five-interception threshold was taken by the South African authorities following consultations with stakeholders after the joint meeting with the EU. These targeted measures appear to have been taken to avert a blanket ban on South African citrus exports. This highlights the value of traceability schemes, which allow the selective targeting of import restrictions in response to perceived sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) threats.

However, this leaves unaddressed the long-standing calls from the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa that "the technical justification for the EU's measures be assessed", given that a pest risk assessment undertaken in response to a 2000 request from the EU "concluded that there was no risk of CBS establishing in the EU as the climate was unsuitable and the fruit is not a pathway". This was subsequently confirmed by a US pest risk assessment in 2010 and by the European Food Safety Agency's conclusion that "the possibility of CBS establishing in the EU is highly unlikely."

This underlying dispute highlights once again the need for some form of formal, transparent, independent and science-based process of dispute settlement for the resolution of SPS and food safety disputes (see *Agritrade* articles ' **The growing importance of non-tariff measures**', 7 October 2013 and ' **Calls for "a right to development" and "a right to trade" to be enshrine...**', 11 October 2013). The issue of getting to grips with non-tariff barriers to trade is likely to form a central component of the EU–US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations (see *Agritrade* article ' **Discussions on standards in EU–US trade negotiations carry global implic...**', 4 May 2013). There could be some value in ACP exporters closely following the progress of these discussions, particularly with regard to the establishment of joint institutions to determine the scientific basis for SPS and food safety measures.

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