agritrade
Informed Analysis, Expert Opinions

News & analysis

Southern Africa , Horticulture , SPS / Food safety

Pressure on EC to act pre-emptively on South African citrus exports as new season approaches

04 May 2014

In March 2014, representatives of Asaja-Andalucía, the Spanish young farmers' association, delivered a petition to the European Commission calling for a pre-emptive ban on South African citrus exports "until phytosanitary standards can be properly verified". The claim was made that the South African government "either does not want to or cannot control, with the most minimal guarantees, the sanitation of its plantations or its fruit shipments to Europe".

Spanish young farmers' representatives sought to argue that "warnings of European scientists" over the dangers of Citrus Black Spot (CBS) contagion were being "overshadowed by commercial and political pressures". They claimed that "the credibility of the Commission and the effectiveness of phytosanitary policy are at risk" as a consequence of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) "not acting more swiftly and strictly".

Also in March 2014, Murcia's Council of Agriculture and Water announced it was developing "a monitoring programme for the Region's citrus warehouses importing South African or Argentinian fruit, with the goal of ensuring food safety and an adequate handling of the discards generated, given the threat posed by the black spot disease". This followed a meeting with Spanish citrus industry representatives, who called on the Ministry of Agriculture to press the EC to introduce stricter "phytosanitary protection measures", including "the testing of samples from all batches and stricter inspections at the points of entry". They underlined the importance of "the threshold of five interceptions", after which the border should be closed.

The Spanish company Valencia Fruits reported in March that Morocco is losing ground to South African, Turkish and Egyptian citrus exporters, with competition being toughest on the EU market. While Moroccan citrus production has "doubled in the past five years, reaching 2.2 million tonnes, the percentage devoted to exports has dropped from 40% to 25%". It was noted that Moroccan exporters are increasingly focusing on the Russian market, "where 61% of their mandarins and clementines and 32% of their oranges were shipped in 2013". However, the development of this market is affected by the volatility of the Russian rouble.

These developments have taken place at the same time as comments from the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGASA), warning that any EU tightening of controls on citrus imports could pose a "huge danger" for the global citrus industry, since ultimately EU "supermarkets just wouldn't get any southern hemisphere citrus." This, CGASA considered, could result in supermarkets promoting other fruit out of season to fill the supply gap, leading to lower overall consumer demand for citrus, even when the European harvest becomes available during the winter months.

Sources
Freshfruitportal.com, 'Spanish association calls on EU to close borders to South African citrus', 27 March 2014
http://www.freshfruitportal.com/2014/03/27/spanish-association-calls-on-...
Freshplaza.com/CARM, 'Murcia to monitor citrus warehouses importing from South Africa and Argentina', 25 March 2014
http://www.freshplaza.com/article/119132/Spain-Murcia-to-monitor-citrus-...
Freshplaza.com, 'Moroccan citrus losing ground to Egypt, Turkey and South Africa', 12 March 2014
http://www.freshplaza.com/article/118704/Moroccan-citrus-losing-ground-t...
Freshfruitportal.com, 'EU tightening could pose "huge danger" for global citrus industry', 11 February 2014
http://www.freshfruitportal.com/2014/02/11/eu-tightening-could-pose-huge...

Editorial comment
While the significance of the representations of the Spanish young farmers' association should not be overstated, Asaja-Andalucía's recent statement is indicative of the pressure being exerted on the European Commission and the EFSA by concerned producers' organisations.

Careful attention will need to be paid to how this influences the position of EU member state governments, and subsequently the EC and EFSA position. The CGASA and the South African government potentially face the dual challenge of not only addressing the scientific basis for CBS controls, but also responding to the public lobbying by Spanish citrus producers of national authorities and the EC, calling on them to strengthen the controls on South African citrus exports.

As CGASA has pointed out, in 2013 estimated additional costs of between R500 and R1,000 million were incurred by Southern Africa's local industry to ensure that South African citrus exports complied with EU SPS requirements (see *Agritrade* article ' **EFSA report confirms current EC control measures for citrus black spot**', 6 April 2014), while in September 2013 the South African government voluntarily restricted exports to the EU from regions where CBS infections had occurred (*Agritrade* article ' **Targeted restrictions placed on South African citrus exports**', 16 November 2013). This suggests that the South African private sector and the South African government are both proactively seeking to ensure that EU CBS concerns are addressed.

These comments need to be seen against the background of the EFSA endorsement of current control measures in its February 2014 report, and the wider ramifications across citrus supply chains of any premature restrictions of imports.

Related content

EU tightens controls on citrus imports from South Africa
Pressure on EC to act pre-emptively on South African citrus exports as new season approaches
SA avocado experience highlights growing importance of addressing SPS issues for market diversification
EFSA report confirms current EC control measures for Citrus Black Spot
Debate on Citrus Black Spot continues

http://agritrade.cta.int/