

S.Africa: Black spot interceptions down in 2015

Improved risk management has South African exporters reaping the benefits as the citrus black spot squeeze is easing. Citrus growers recorded the lowest interceptions in the European Union (EU) this year and exported a record 118-million cartons of the fruit this season, with 50-million going to the region. In the previous year, SA exported 113-million cartons.

Citrus Growers Association CEO Justin Chadwick said on Monday that he hoped the improvements, which have come at a cost of R1bn a year, mean the EU "will look at us favourably" when it reviews the country's 2015 season.

In total, there have been 15 interceptions this year, down from 28 in 2014 and 35 in 2013, said Mr Chadwick.

The industry exports 600,000 tonnes to Europe and generates R9bn from global exports, R4bn of which comes from the EU. This represents 40% of SA's citrus exports.

EU officials conducted site inspections at pack houses in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo after which they compiled a report on SA's risk management of citrus black spot. In August, the EU released a report in which it wrote glowingly about SA's efforts to curb the incidence of citrus black spot.

However, this has come at enormous cost, said Mr Chadwick, with farmers spending R1bn a year to keep up with sanitary measures to keep black spot at bay.

Citrus growers are now working with the department to put in a request to the EU's plant health committee to reconsider the emergency measures.

"This (emergency measures) is not sustainable in the long term, which is why we continue to work hand in hand with our government to reach a permanent resolution of this dispute to ensure the continued growth and survival of this key trading relationship."

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