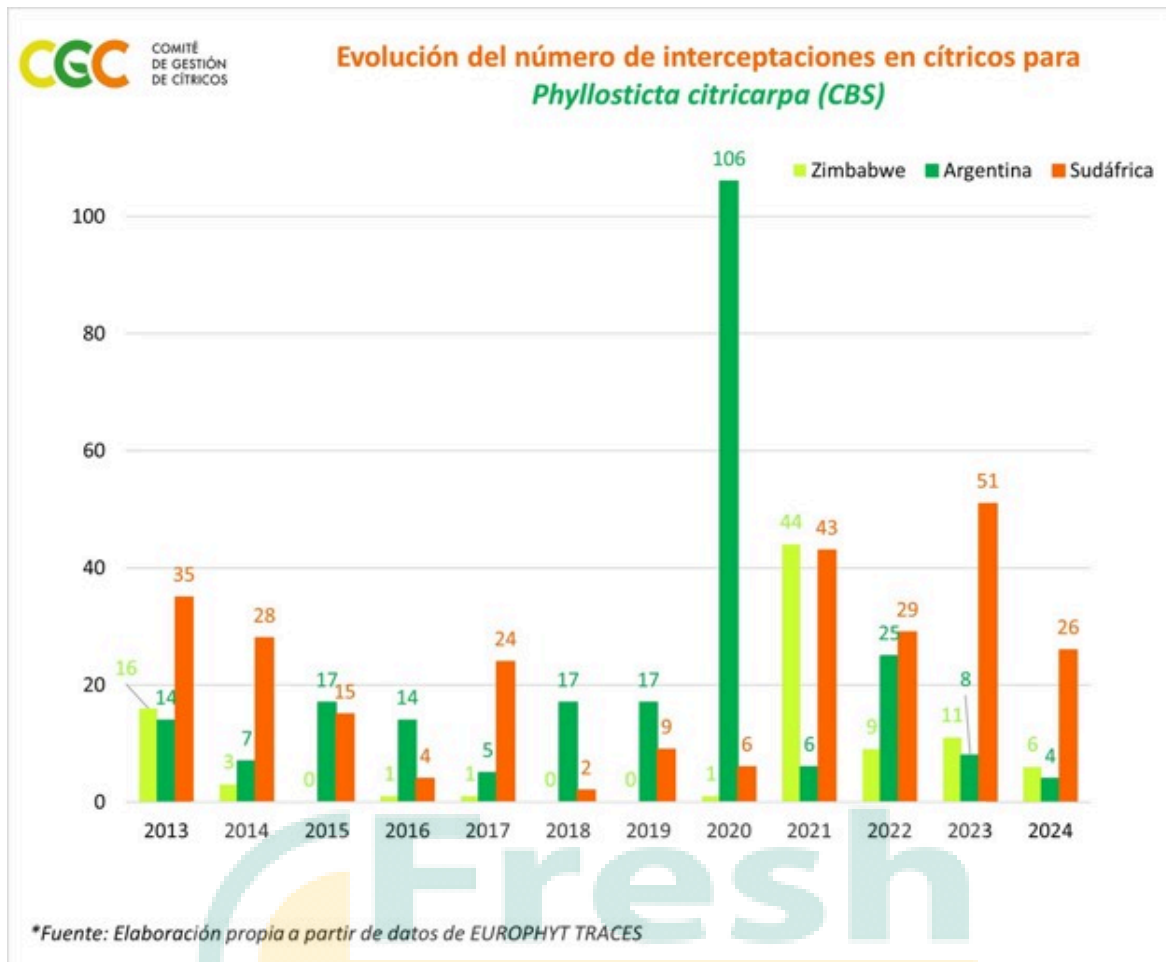


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Citrus Management Committee

"South Africa has an annual average of 37 CBS rejections since 2021"

With the 7 rejections due to black spot (*Phyllosticta citricarpa* or CBS) recorded in European ports last September, the year's total number of detections of the presence of this dangerous fungus (whose control is regulated as a "priority" by the EU) in citrus fruit coming from South Africa is now 26. The number of interceptions for the whole of 2024, as recorded by the official Erophyt-Traces statistics, proves that the problems that operators in this country have had to control this disease are not temporary. In fact, since 2021, and considering this year's data as provisional (because they do not include October, which is also a particularly import-intensive month), the southern African country has had an average of 37 interceptions per year for this reason. To these figures we may indirectly add those of Zimbabwe (another six this year); a neighboring country whose main producers and exporters are members of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA).



In the opinion of the Citrus Management Committee (CGC), the umbrella organization for private citrus exporters in Spain, these figures are "unacceptable and are increasing the risk of contagion to EU plantations, because we already know that this pathogen, contrary to what we were told precisely by South Africa, can adapt to the Mediterranean climate, as demonstrated by its presence in Tunisia, where it has been spreading unchecked since it was first detected in 2019," says CGC president Inmaculada Sanfeliu, who therefore concludes that the panel requested in the World Trade Organization (WTO) against the EU "has lost all sense before it could even be convened." Far from acceding to South Africa's demands, which wants more flexible regulations against not only black spot, but also false codling moth, "we should actually make them tougher, and/or bring them into line with those of other Western countries, such as the U.S.," says Sanfeliu.

Contrary to what has happened in seven of the last eleven import seasons, in the current campaign, the South African exporters' association (CGA) has not unilaterally suspended orange imports from areas declared to have this pathogen, which means that the European Commission (EC) has not forced them to do so, despite the very high number of interceptions. In this regard, it is worth recalling that in 2023 they did adopt such a measure and from 15 September, theoretically, exports were only carried out from areas declared free of the disease. This did not prevent the detection of 12 consignments of infected oranges in October of that

year, when the restriction was already in force. "South Africa has lost all credit when it comes to plant health, so before calling the EU to account in the WTO, the EC should ask for explanations for this irregularity and check whether they are really complying with the requirements of EU regulations and are using the most efficient fungicides against the disease. Perhaps they'll confirm that they are not, and that by trying to save on treatments with the most suitable (and most expensive) products they are putting our citrus sector at risk," says the head of the CGC.

That would help explain why this year, despite the worrying number of CBS rejections recorded in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, the CGA has refused to enforce this measure. Such a restriction, which is essentially cosmetic, has been promoted repeatedly in the past to prevent a stronger reaction from the EU because, in fact, the areas where the fungus is officially present are also the earliest, and in September and October almost all of these have already been harvested and their fruit has been marketed. The seriousness of the impact of CBS is illustrated by the letter that, in April, the EC itself sent to South African authorities as a response to the call for consultations in the WTO. In that letter, the EU executive outlined that the economic impact resulting from the hypothetical impact of black spot in European citrus-growing areas would, according to EFSA, amount to 1,182 million Euro.

The situation of the two other pathogens also regulated by the EU as priorities, namely the false codling moth (*Thaumatotibia leucotreta*) and *citrus greening* (or HLB), is no less concerning. Regarding the former, for which South African authorities have requested a second panel at the WTO, the CGC noted the repeated or recurrent non-compliance of South African operators with the conditions regulated in 2022, requiring oranges from countries affected by the false codling moth to be subjected to cold treatment. This year, there have been two interceptions of oranges in which the presence of codling moth larvae was confirmed (one from South Africa and one from Zimbabwe) and another one in lemons (also from Zimbabwe). In 2023, there were 4 (3 from South Africa and 1 from Israel, which is exempted from this treatment). For these reasons, the CGC is calling for cold treatment to be extended to all countries affected by this pathogen and to all species which, like those mentioned above, are accredited as hosts for the larvae of this pathogen (not only oranges, but also mandarins and lemons).

As for HLB, the CGC itself warned already in April of the reappearance in South Africa of the African strain (*Candidatus liberibacter africanus*), which is known to be less virulent than the Asian strain, but equally serious, causing a drastic reduction in the production, and even death of the tree in many cases. According to Citrus Research International (CRI), South Africa's leading citrus center, funded

by its own exporters, the presence in the country of this variant, which, like the *asiaticus*, has no cure, was confirmed as early as 2022, and it was more recently, in October 2023, when the CRI itself reported that it had again been detected in Gqeberha (in the south-east of the country). This is a residential area with a particularly critical role, given its proximity to one of the largest producing areas, Sundays River, and to the Citrus Foundation Block facilities, where the budwood is sanitized and used by the nurseries that supply fruit trees to the whole country. On October 4, more than two years after the first detection and just one year after the second, more serious one, the South African Ministry of Agriculture announced the launch of a "surveillance program" in the area "in order to determine whether or not the pest is widely spread and allow the implementation of effective and efficient phytosanitary measures." The president of the CGC lamented how, in the face of a major disease such as this, "only an initial delimitation has been implemented, and it's still not entirely clear what areas are affected. The authorities, which are the only ones competent to apply quarantine measures, have taken too long to react," says the head of the Spanish exporters' association.



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