

Black spot decision "unacceptable"

Copa-Cogeca criticises proposals that it says will weaken import controls to prevent black spot disease in citrus fruit coming into Europe

It is "unacceptable" that the EU Standing Committee on Plant Health has agreed to weaken import controls to prevent black spot disease (CBS) in citrus fruit coming into Europe when the number of cases of the highly contagious diseases is on the rise, Copa-Cogeca has said.

The EU Commission proposal was approved by the EU Standing Committee in Brussels on Friday (15 April).

Copa-Cogeca has pointed out that figures show that the number of CBS cases are rising, with 70 cases detected from Uruguay, 15 from South Africa, 17 from Argentina and 13 from Brazil.

This, the group noted, is way above the EU Commissions permissible limit of five fixed by the EU Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as set out in EC Decision 2014/422.

Copa and Cogeca Secretary-General Pekka Pesonen warned: "We oppose outright this decision which is due to enter into force this Summer on three accounts. First it proposes letting contaminated citrus fruit from entering the EU for use in processing. Secondly, the Commission has proposed to delete its decision vis a vis ensuring that controls are stepped up after the sixth interception in the same year, despite advice from EFSA. Moreover, the Commission sent the proposal to Member States in the EU Committee only 3 days before the vote and many said this did not give them enough time to analyse it properly.

"Unless the EU Commission puts in place strong measures to prevent the spread of the contagious disease, there is a serious risk it will enter the EU," he continued. "This is unacceptable given that black spot is a disease that is not present in Europe and its presence could have a bad impact on the citrus sector in producer countries.

"The EU citrus fruit sector is vital both from an economic and social point of view. It provides the EU with high quality produce, at the same time as ensuring employment for millions of people in EU rural areas, both upstream and downstream, especially in southern countries. It threatens 600,000ha and 5m tonnes of produce.

"We should not take the risk of importing the disease," Pesonen concluded. "The impact would be catastrophic for EU citrus fruit producers. The EU should not wait for the disease to enter the EU before taking action."

FRESHPRODUCE
Journal FPS

