

AFRICA / OTHER

Citrus growers call for WTO dispute with EU

04 Aug 2023 - by Staff reporter



Source: Citrus Industry

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has called on President Cyril Ramaphosa to urgently intervene to halt allegedly unfair trade regulations enforced on the local citrus industry by the European Union.

Deon Joubert, CGA special envoy for market access and EU matters, said the EU regulations, in particular the discriminatory trade regulations on Citrus Black Spot (CBS), were threatening thousands of jobs in the local sector.

“The CGA and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation have worked together for over ten years to put a stop to the CBS regulations, but unfortunately the EU has continued to enforce rules that are unscientific and irrational,” Joubert said.

“The situation has now become so serious that substantial losses in jobs and revenue are on the horizon unless immediate action is taken.”

Joubert said it was now critical that the South African government “draws a line in the sand” and calls for an official World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute with the EU over its CBS regulations.

“The industry has continued to raise the fact that CBS is a cosmetic issue that only affects a minuscule percentage of fruit exported, as a result of South Africa’s world-class control measures. Even though there is conclusive evidence that citrus fruit without leaves is not a pathway for the spread of CBS, the EU has continued to enforce these unreasonable measures,” Joubert said.

He added that the EU was the only overseas market holding this position on CBS as other markets acknowledged that the risk of the disease spreading through fresh fruit trading was “completely negligible”.

“It is clear that the EU restrictions are nothing more than a protectionist impulse. Through their actions they are blocking South African citrus to unfairly benefit their own members, specifically the Spanish citrus industry. The South African government is on record that the EU regulations on CBS are trade-restrictive and not a plant health issue,” he said.

Local citrus growers nevertheless have had to implement a comprehensive CBS risk management programme over the past few years.

The Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) has quantified the cost of CBS risk management for the EU market in excess of R2 billion per year.

“This is completely beyond our industry’s financial ability. Our growers are already under pressure due to the electricity and logistics crises the country is currently experiencing, and the major hike in input costs over the past two years,” Joubert said.

He warned that jobs and livelihoods would be lost if the matter was not resolved.

“The EU citrus market currently sustains a total of 70 000 jobs and generates R15bn in foreign earnings. So far this season the EU has claimed a number of interceptions of CBS. However, a pattern of erroneous classifications of CBS has been established,” he said.

Joubert added that in Belgium and Portugal CBS tests had proved to be unreliable and resulted in false positives.

“For instance, Portugal claims a CBS interception from amongst Western Cape fruit, while this province has been proven to be completely free of the pest. This type of action suggests an established agenda to block South African trade and the CGA is in the process of raising formal objections to these interceptions at an EU level,” he said.

“The CGA calls on the South African government to work with the industry to put a stop to these CBS regulations. Declaring a WTO dispute is truly a matter of urgency.”

Sign up to our mailing list and get daily news headlines and weekly features directly to your inbox free.

Subscribe to receive print copies of Freight News Features to your door.

0 Comments

1 Login ▼

G

Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS ?

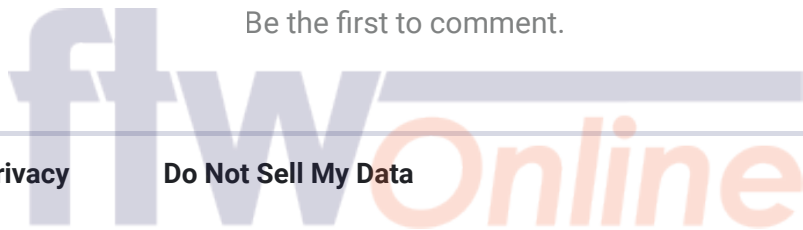
Name



Share

Best Newest Oldest

Be the first to comment.



Subscribe

Privacy

Do Not Sell My Data

