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Friday, 17 June 2016

## INDUSTRY

**Black spots fungi found in SA citrus EU export**

Sapa



A consignment of SA citrus fruit heading to Europe has been found to have citrus black spots, the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) said on Sunday.

"This is the first time EU inspectors have detected CBS in fruit from South Africa this year," said Citrus Growers' Association CEO Justin Chadwick in a statement.

He said that Dutch authorities for plant health had issued a notification of phytosanitary non-compliance on Sunday after intercepting the consignment.

Phytosanitary measures are designed to ensure consignments of plants --especially agricultural crops - - are free from disease.

CBS is caused by a fungi infecting the fruit.

"This is disappointing news particularly considering the steps taken to ensure compliance with, and demonstrate commitment to meeting the European Union's requirements."

The notification means that citrus imports from SA are placed on a trade watch-list at EU borders.

If spotty fruit is found, the consignments are impounded.

Chadwick said the CGA's special envoy to the EU, Deon Joubert, had left for Europe on Sunday to meet with EU representatives over the matter.

He also said that the farm in question would be visited by both representatives of the government's agricultural department as well as an expert from the CGA to see how the fruit sent for export could have slipped through the system of risk management and to seek ways to remedy the situation.

Chadwick said that it remained under dispute as to whether commercial fruit from areas where CBS was found could be a risk to citrus-producing countries in the EU.

"It remains imperative that this difference of opinion -- and the science that underlies it -- is resolved once and for all."

In May this year, the agriculture department announced it would try to ensure South Africa complied with the European Commission's new citrus import requirements.

This followed the commission's standing committee on plant health endorsing stricter import requirements for SA citrus fruit being exported to Europe.

At the time, department spokeswoman Makenosi Maroo said measures --including the registration of orchards and fields, mandatory spraying regimes and various inspections -- had been put in place to ensure exported citrus did not contain the fungi in question.

She also said that the department did not believe that commercial fruit posed a risk to the EU.

Previously, commission spokesman Frederic Vincent said that stricter measures were needed to protect European crops from CBS as this plant disease was not native to Europe.

In November last year, the EU stopped importing citrus fruit from South Africa as there were concerns that citrus black spot could infect local crops.

At that stage, about 70 percent of the EU's citrus came from South Africa.

In 2013, South Africa was the world's biggest exporter of oranges and the largest shipper of grapefruit.

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