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Friday, 17 June 2016

NEWS

SA citrus growers want independent panel

Tshepiso Mokheba, Bloomberg



Citrus growers in South Africa, the world's biggest orange exporter, asked the government to set up an independent panel to help resolve a dispute with the European Union over the region's stricter import requirements.

The association wants the panel to consider the merits of the findings of a report, which stated that citrus black-spot disease, a fungus that causes fruit blemishes and sometimes affects South African produce, can't be established or spread to EU fruits, Chief Executive Officer Justin Chadwick said.

Citrus from the country, which represents about a third of all the EU's imports, has been subject to more stringent checks to prevent the spread of the disease to the bloc, the European Commission, the EU's administrative arm, said in May. While the International Plant Protector Convention, which aims to stop the movement of pests, has a dispute-resolution mechanism that South Africa wanted to start in 2010, it was postponed to allow the EU to do its own assessment.

"Now that it is clear that the dispute has not yet been resolved, we have asked the Department of Agriculture to resume with that IPPC process to get resolutions," Chadwick said by phone from Hillcrest, near Durban in the southeastern part of the country. "We are asking for an expert panel to be formed, an independent panel that will consider the merits of the group that has sent the latest paper and report."

While CBS results in leaf-spotting, it isn't harmful to humans. The fungus can survive transport and storage and could establish itself in EU areas that produce citrus, the European Food Safety Authority has said.

"The regulations that Europe has put in place to restrict the imports of citrus are unnecessary and are without technical justification," Vaughan Hattingh, who is CEO of Citrus Research International and was one of the contributors to the report, said by phone from Cape Town. "If the government as an exporting country wishes to challenge the import regulations that Europe has in place, they can use this document as supporting evidence for their argument."

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