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Friday, 17 June 2016

## INDUSTRY

**Farmers take R1bn hit from citrus fungus**

Reuters



JOHANNESBURG - South African citrus producers will voluntarily suspend exports to the European Union in order to comply with EU standards against a fungal disease infecting the skin of some of their fruit, an industry body said on Monday.

The Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa said sales to the lucrative market that usually takes up nearly half of its exports would fall by 15% this year because of its action against the citrus black spot (CBS) disease.

The body said that although the small spots on the peel of some fruit were only a cosmetic problem, it would not insist on exports so as to continue accessing its key market in 2015.

"We don't want this to become an escalation of trade issues, so we have voluntarily stopped that," said Deon Joubert, an EU representative for the South African growers' body.

Farmers would forego fruit exports worth R500 million and had incurred additional spraying costs of R480 million this year, Joubert said.

About 45% of South Africa's 8 billion rand-a-year citrus exports end up in the EU, but the presence of the fungus in some shipments to the bloc led to a ban of lemons, oranges and tangerines late last year.

South Africa is the main source of oranges for the juice drunk by consumers in Britain, Germany and France during Europe's summer, but southern European growers fear the fungus could take hold in their citrus groves should that fruit continue accessing its market.

The African producers maintain fruits cannot transfer the disease and say banning their fruit from all EU countries is unfair because there are no citrus groves in northern Europe due to the colder climate, meaning there was no risk from the fungus.

Not all South African growing regions suffer from the disease, which is harmless to humans but causes unsightly lesions on the fruit and leaves. There is no known cure, but fungicides can be used to control its spread.



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