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R50m black spot for citrus farms

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Citrus growers in South Africa face losses of about R50-million after voluntarily suspending all exports of organic lemons to the European Union due to the risk of citrus black spot.



Citrus growers have had a difficult two years after the EU imposed a ban on South African imports in November 2013 because of citrus black spot. File photo
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However, despite being highly priced, organic lemons make up a small portion of citrus production. Though acknowledging the losses, farmers said they were choosing to view the suspension of exports to the EU as a way to help safeguard a key market.

Growers said yesterday they would withdraw all their organic lemon exports to the EU next year.

Citrus growers have had a difficult two years after the EU imposed a ban on South African imports in November 2013 because of citrus black spot. The ban was lifted in January 2014.

Citrus black spot causes blemishes on the fruit's peel.

The citrus industry generates R9-billion from global exports, R4-billion of which comes from the EU.

Citrus growers felt that while the latest decision to suspend exports of organic lemons to the EU would affect some farmers, it would also serve to strengthen and improve the credibility of the industry's risk management system that was put in place to mitigate the risk of citrus black spot.

"It will have an impact on those growers. It could be [a sacrifice of] about R50-million ... on their side and for them to voluntarily [do] this is very commendable," Citrus Growers Association EU envoy Deon Joubert said.

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