



PRESS STATEMENT BY JUSTIN CHADWICK

CEO OF THE CITRUS GROWERS' ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Political intervention at upcoming AU-EU Ministerial Conference can save SA citrus from devastating EU regulations

The Citrus Growers' Association of South Africa (CGA) has written to the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, requesting that she makes unfair and discriminatory pest regulations by the European Union a priority at the 5th African Union (AU) - European Union (EU) Agriculture Ministerial Conference taking place in Rome on the 30th of June.

The EU's regulations on False Codling Moth (FCM) and Citrus Black Spot (CBS) are posing a threat to the future of the local citrus industry. AU and EU Ministers of Agriculture will be attending the Conference along with representatives of various international organisations, which makes it a crucial opportunity for the South African government to push for a resolution on these critical matters in order to safeguard the 140 000 jobs our sector sustains.

The local orange export season starts in all earnestness towards the end of July and the impact of the new FCM regulations are expected to be devastating. Their introduction in the middle of the 2022 export season already resulted in R200 million in losses for growers with this number expected to spiral out of control during the current season. Current estimates are that around 20% of oranges produced for Europe will not be shipped this year because of the new regulations. This means that approximately 80 000 tons of oranges might not make it to European supermarket shelves, resulting in a further R500 million economic blow to the industry.

The CGA remains of the view that the new regulations have no basis in science and prescribes cold treatment that simply isn't warranted. Our industry has presented clear evidence that our stringent FCM risk management system is highly effective ensuring that 99.9% of oranges entering the EU are pest free (with only 2 FCM interceptions detected in the over 400 000 tons of oranges shipped to the region in 2022).

Despite this evidence, months of consultations between the South African government and EU counterparts at a WTO level have achieved no progress in the matter.

CBS is mostly a cosmetic issue that only effects a tiny percentage of fruit exported, largely as a result of South Africa's world-class control measures. Even though there is scientific evidence that citrus fruit without leaves is not a pathway for the spread of CBS, the EU has continued to enforce draconian and unreasonable measures on citrus being exported from countries where the pest is found.

While it is evident that these restrictions are nothing more than a protectionist impulse by the EU, local citrus growers nevertheless had to implement a comprehensive CBS risk management programme over the past few years.

Taken together, the CBS and FCM protocols and proactive measures are costing the local citrus industry R3.7 billion annually, placing further cost pressures on an industry that is already coping with continued loadshedding, a dysfunctional rail network, decaying roads, and congested ports.

The upcoming AU - EU Agriculture Ministerial Conference presents a chance to break the impasse on the regulations and to stop the potentially disastrous effect the regulations will have on thousands of local growers and all the livelihoods they support.

The CGA remains committed to working with all government and industry stakeholders to address this issue with the urgency it requires to safeguard the profitability and sustainability of our local industry.

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Note to editors: please accredit all quotes to Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association.

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