

## Scientists disagree with recent EFSA statement on Citrus Black Spot

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The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) issued a press release on 17 June 2016 (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/160617>), stating that “Newly available information on citrus black spot supports advice issued by EFSA in 2014”. The EFSA statement arises from a European Commission request for EFSA to assess two recent scientific publications on Citrus Black Spot (CBS). One of the publications was a 2015 publication by Dr Roger Magarey and co-authors. Magarey noted that “the response of EFSA to the Magarey et al. (2015) paper was disappointing”. He explains that “EFSA have based their CBS recommendation on studies that did not include negative controls, making it difficult to determine if Europe is suitable for CBS or not. The Magarey et al. (2015) study clearly indicated that most of Europe was similar to areas in Australia and South Africa where CBS does not occur”.

Such disagreement between the scientists and EFSA’s opinion based on the scientists’ own results is not new. In preparation for the release of EFSA’s opinion on the potential risk to the EU posed by *Phyllosticta citricarpa*, the fungus that causes Citrus Black Spot (CBS), EFSA released a draft report in 2013. In an unprecedented move, an international panel of 37 scientists and technical specialists with CBS experience, voluntarily cooperated in refuting the proposed EFSA opinion. This international CBS Expert panel, including scientists from USA, Brazil, Argentina, Australia and South Africa, provided EFSA with a 55 page detailed critique of the draft EFSA opinion (<http://www.citrusres.com/sites/default/files/documents/CBS%20Expert%20Panel%20comments%20EFSA%20PRA%20CBS%202013.pdf>). The expert panel concluded that EFSA’s assessment of the potential risk of CBS for the EU was exaggerated, was contrary to scientific evidence and misaligned with the practical realities of CBS. When EFSA released its finalised opinion in 2014, it was evident that they had dismissed the essence of the advice from the expert panel.

In 2014 the CBS expert panel, released a document detailing the extent of EFSA’s dismissal of the expert panel’s inputs (<http://www.citrusres.com/sites/default/files/documents/Comment%20on%20the%202014%20EFSA%20PRA%20final.pdf>). In this document the expert panel questioned the integrity of the EFSA process, given the wholesale extent of EFSA’s disregard for the expert opinion provided. The expert panel noted that it appeared that the EFSA process was designed to provide justification for an existing position on CBS. In 2015 this international panel again refuted claims by EFSA that they had addressed the expert panel’s inputs (<http://www.citrusres.com/sites/default/files/documents/Response%20to%20EFSA%202015%20final.pdf>).

The CBS expert panel lamented the fact that EFSA based its conclusions on model predictions without including reference sites to place their model output into realistic perspective. Subsequently, the research paper published by Magarey and co-authors, reported on CBS modelling similar to EFSA’s, but importantly with the inclusion of positive and negative reference sites.

The Magarey paper specifically concluded “that Europe is less suitable for CBS than suggested by an earlier study produced by the European Food Safety Authority using a similar model” and predicted “only a few isolated locations in the extreme south of Europe are likely to have a low to marginal risk of *P. citricarpa* establishment”. Magarey further explains that “their study showed that marginally favourable seasons for

CBS were predicted to occur infrequently at these locations and were interrupted by dry conditions unsuitable for disease spread". Compared with model output for localities where CBS disease occurs, Dr Paul Fourie, a co-author on the Magarey paper, is of the opinion that "even if the fungus were to become established in any of these EU locations, there is no real prospect of CBS developing into a disease of economic importance".