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Citrus Black Spot – Team work required to ensure continued access to the EU market

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Background

Most countries that have Citrus Black Spot (CBS) have access to the European Union based on control systems that are implemented to ensure that no fruit with CBS lesions enter that market. In South Africa, our National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO) of the National Department of Agriculture (DOA), has built up an international reputation of excellence in ensuring that they abide by their commitment to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) – in essence this commitment is to reduce the risk of the spread of pests and diseases around the globe. Together with the citrus industry, DOA has introduced effective measures that have resulted in a dramatic drop in CBS interceptions in the EU, from twenty-two interceptions in 1999 to just two in 2003. These measures are continually reassessed to ensure that South African citrus exports continue to comply with the phytosanitary regulations of importing countries. Growers, exporters, researchers, inspection agencies and government have worked together to maintain our status as a country committed to the ideals of the IPPC.

Brazil and Argentina

In November 2003 Spain took emergency steps prohibiting imports of citrus fruits from Argentina and Brazil. This followed a number of interceptions of citrus fruits originating in these countries that were infested with harmful organisms – in particular citrus canker and CBS. In 2004, additional temporary emergency measures were taken to protect the EU – these measures apply to all citrus fruits originating in Argentina and Brazil destined for the EU. Should these measures be insufficient, or not be complied with, more stringent or alternative measures are envisaged. The effect of these measures will be continually assessed until 30 November 2004. In addition, each member state importing citrus from these countries will have to provide a detailed technical report to the Commission on the plant health checks by 31 December 2004. Between 1 May and 30 November 2004 the Commission will continually follow the development of the situation.

The decision will be reviewed by 31 January 2005 at the latest.

Measures Introduced

Citrus fruit originating in Argentina or Brazil must be accompanied by a certificate officially stating that:

- The fruit originates from a CBS-free area

OR

- No symptoms have been observed in the place of production since the last production cycle, and none of the fruit has shown symptoms of CBS,

AND

- The place of production, packing facilities, exporters and any other operator handling the fruit, are officially registered for this purpose.

Citrus may only enter the community if its movements from place of production to the point of export to the community, is accompanied by documents issued by the National Plant Protection Organisation of Brazil and Argentina.

Comments

These measures are very stringent. In effect the only exports that can take place from Argentina and Brazil to the EU will be from CBS-free areas, or from CBS-free production sites.

The southern African citrus industry needs to continue to strictly implement CBS control measures during picking and packing of fruit for the EU during 2004. With these measures in place for Argentina and Brazil, the EU authorities will be extra vigilant with imports from all southern hemisphere countries. The care that has been taken in the past has resulted in low interceptions, and hence we were not grouped with Argentina and Brazil in terms of these emergency measures. Our plant health department is recognised as doing an excellent job in ensuring that we are not a phytosanitary threat, and growers, packers and exporters have implemented, monitored and controlled the required systems to reduce the possibility of interceptions with good effect. As in the past, these systems will be strictly enforced during 2004.