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UK rule changes could tighten SA citrus exports

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Proposed UK-EU regulatory alignment could require South African citrus exports to meet EU phytosanitary standards from mid-2027.

South African citrus exporters could face stricter phytosanitary requirements for shipments to the United Kingdom from mid-2027 under proposed changes that would align Great Britain's sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) rules with those of the European Union.

In its latest *Consumer Assurance Update*, the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) and Citrus Research International (CRI) said the proposed UK-EU SPS reset would require citrus exported to Great Britain to comply with the same phytosanitary requirements that currently applied to exports destined for the EU.

Although negotiations are still under way, the UK government has confirmed its intention for the agreement to take effect in mid-2027 and has urged businesses across the agrifood sector to begin preparing for the changes.

If implemented as proposed, orchards supplying fruit to the UK would need to be registered under the EU phytosanitary system, while exports would be subject to orchard, packhouse and PPECB inspections and phytosanitary certification for pests and diseases such as citrus black spot (CBS), false codling moth (FCM), fruit flies and citrus scab.

The CGA and CRI said the changes would reduce exporters' flexibility to redirect fruit to the UK market, as consignments not prepared under the EU phytosanitary system would no longer automatically qualify for export to Great Britain.

The organisations also warned that maximum residue limits (MRLs) for crop protection products in Great Britain are expected to realign with EU limits, potentially reducing flexibility for exporters if the two markets adopt identical standards.

They cautioned that proposed changes under the EU's Food and Feed Omnibus package could have an even greater long-term impact. The proposals include lowering maximum residue limits for certain active substances no longer approved in the EU to the limit of quantification, effectively setting them at technically zero.

According to the CGA and CRI, the South African citrus industry is lobbying for scientifically based residue limits founded on independent consumer risk assessments, rather than limits determined solely by whether an active substance remains authorised for use within the EU.

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