UK plans stricter phytosanitary rules for South African citrus

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

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) and Citrus Research International (CRI) outline the implications in their latest Consumer Assurance Update, noting that the proposed UK-EU SPS reset would require citrus exported to Great Britain to comply with the same phytosanitary requirements that currently apply to EU-bound exports. 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.

If the proposals are implemented as described, orchards supplying fruit to the UK would need to register under the EU phytosanitary system. Exports would also be subject to orchard, packhouse and PPECB inspections, as well as phytosanitary certification covering pests and diseases including citrus black spot, false codling moth, fruit flies and citrus scab.

The CGA and CRI say 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. Negotiations between the UK and EU are still under way.

On maximum residue limits, the CGA and CRI say crop protection product MRLs in Great Britain are expected to realign with EU limits, which could reduce flexibility for exporters if the two markets adopt identical standards.

The organisations also flag that proposed changes under the EU's Food and Feed Omnibus package could carry an even greater long-term impact. Those 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.

The CGA and CRI say 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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