Red spider mites, thrips, and mealybugs threaten Valencia's citrus industry

Valencian citrus farmers are facing heightened pest pressures amid a heatwave, as early varieties have just finished fruit set and the use of plant protection products is increasingly restricted for growers.

The fields are already facing threats from the two-spotted spider mite, South African thrips (*Scirtothrips aurantii*), South African mealybug (*Delottococcus aberiae*), and the Mediterranean fruit fly (*Ceratitis capitata*). "We have already detected red spider mites, which have caused significant yield losses in clemenules this season, along with South African thrips, which are affecting young shoots for the first time," stated Carles Peris, general secretary of La Unió Llauradora i Ramadera.

According to Peris, thrips mainly affect young orchards. "This pest stunts the growth of young trees, although it has less of an effect on the fruit." Recent data from the Regional Ministry of Agriculture shows that this pest is now present in 332 municipalities spanning the three Valencian provinces and has also been detected on avocado trees.

"The population levels of the South African mealybug and fruit fly are similar to previous seasons, because we are struggling to control them," he said. The challenge in lowering these populations is mainly due to the reduction of approved active substances and the lack of effective alternatives, which limits growers' ability to respond.

The consequences are impacting farm profitability. Cosmetic damage and quality degradation reduce the amount of fruit fit for the fresh market, leading to more production being redirected to processing, where prices tend to be lower. La Unió estimates that 20% to 25% of the harvest is allocated to the processing industry.

La Unió has urged the Ministry of Agriculture to reinstate a dedicated funding line for applied research to provide a rapid response to emerging pests and diseases.

The organization also cautions about the potential spread or introduction of organisms like *Aleurocanthus spiniferus*, *Toumeyella parvicornis,* and *Trioza erytreae.* It highlights the recent detection of the citrus yellow vein chlorosis virus as an example of the urgent need for quicker action.

They ask the Ministry to issue a targeted call for proposals with dedicated funding to promote rapid-response projects, improve coordination among public research centers, accelerate the development of early-detection systems, and strengthen technology transfer to growers and cooperatives.
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