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SA fruit industry not ready for new international container weight regulations

11:38 (GMT+2), Thu, Thursday, May 26, 2016

By *Glennis Kriel*

South African fruit exporters have just over a month left to prepare themselves for a new international requirement concerning the weighing of shipping containers.

The requirement, which would come into effect on 1 July 2016, was created at the beginning of 2015 after the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) amended the Safety of Life at Sea Convention (SOLAS). Containers would now need a verified weight in order to be loaded onto a ship for exports.

According to the amendment, it would be the shipper's responsibility to verify the weight of the container, and containers not meeting these requirements would not be allowed to be loaded onto a ship, or offloaded at a port.

According to Mitchell Brooke, logistics development manager at the Citrus Growers' Association, the fruit industry needed at least another 18 months to prepare for the new regulations.

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"The first official notice was only circulated in South Africa in June last year, while we only saw the official guidelines towards the end of January this year. We need these guidelines to ascertain the scope of the requirements and criteria specific to weighing equipment and the certification process," Brooke said.

According to the amendments, there were two methods shippers could use to determine container weight. The first method involved the container being weighed after it had been packed, and would entail trucks being weighed on weighbridges both with and without the containers.

It had been proposed that trucks could be weighed at port terminals, but there were also concerns that this could exacerbate port congestion problems.

The second method would involve all the cargo and contents being weighed separately and added together, to give the total weight of the container. Brooke said this was problematic because the majority of fruit packhouses and container packing facilities did not have the required weighing equipment.

They would have to order and install this equipment, which then would have to be calibrated and certified by an accredited laboratory. Each weigh point and shipper would also need to undergo an audit to verify the weighing process.

"There are well over 400 fruit packhouses and about 200 local shippers of fruit that would require an audit to receive accreditation as part of the new requirements, and at the moment there are only a handful of people who can conduct these audits," Brooke said.

The industry was also concerned because SOLAS did not factor in any measure for mass tolerance, and severe penalties had been stipulated for the misdeclaration of information.

This was concerning because moisture loss affected the weight of fruit; one study, for example, found that the mass of a citrus pallet could change by 5% within a week, according to Brooke.

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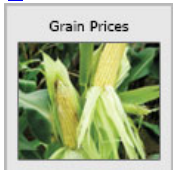


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