

South African relief and anger at Spanish citrus allegations

The South African Citrus Growers Association (CGA) has expressed relief and anger at the admission of the Spanish Citrus Management Committee (CGC) that there were no South African citrus on the shelves of Spanish supermarkets during December 2016. Spanish growers' union Unió de Llauradors alleged that "bad quality" citrus from South Africa was putting pressure on Spanish citrus growers. The CGC now says that the oranges were erroneously labelled as South African and were, in fact, of Spanish origin.

The South African Citrus Growers Association CEO, Justin Chadwick, calls the allegations "a slap in the face" for South African growers. "We're very proud of our product and well-known for good quality citrus. A lot of growers were very upset."

"We were very surprised at the allegation since our citrus reaches Europe before 15 October and our last Navel consignment by mid-September already. It would be very strange if oranges that old were still on the shelves since Spain produces excellent citrus themselves," says Deon Joubert, CGA envoy to the European Union.

"However, it is a big concern for South Africa that such a mistake could occur at packhouses where labels are printed electronically. It's difficult to see how this could have happened accidentally and one wonders if there was any intentional act here to stir up emotions between SA and Spain."

If the mistake was the result of negligence, someone should be held accountable for the impact it has had on the reputation of the South African citrus industry, Chadwick says.

Joubert adds that South African citrus imports to Spain complement the local growing season and keeps citrus on the minds of local consumers year-round, thereby benefiting the Spanish citrus industry and that South Africa still considers Spain an excellent trading partner.

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