

*USA officially recognises that citrus fruit are not a pathway for transmission of citrus black spot*

## Watershed moment for SA citrus: full entry into the USA

"A watershed moment for the South African citrus industry" – several citrus traders have used this phrase to describe the rule published by the United States this week to amend regulations regarding importation of citrus from the whole of South Africa into the United States.

Previously only citrus from the Western and Northern Cape, where citrus black spot does not occur, were allowed. Citrus black spot occurs in Florida but not in California and within the United States there has long been a recognition that citrus fruit is not a vector of the fungal disease.

With the rule published in the United States Federal Registry of 11 June, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has now "put its money where its mouth is", as one industry representative puts it. It is not final yet, but there is a process to allow citrus from across South Africa and it is close to certain that the wording of the rule, as it currently stands, will be accepted.

"This action will allow for the importation of fresh citrus fruit, including citrus hybrids, from the Republic of South Africa while continuing to provide protection against the introduction of plants pests into the United States," reads the amendment. This means that according to US regulations, citrus black spot is not a quarantine organism.

Citrus varieties that stand to gain benefit from greater access to the US market, are grapefruit, seedless Valencias like Midnights, Deltas, late mandarins and late navels. Due to the shipping protocol to the USA, lemons could suffer cold damage if sent to the United States.

"This is positive news because the citrus industry is in a growth phase and this is a validation of our standpoint regarding citrus black spot," says an industry representative.

### **"We don't have stars in our eyes about the US market"**

While the South African industry is excited about the development, there is also caution. "We don't necessarily go into the US market with stars in our eyes," says Jan-Louis Pretorius of Groep 91 Uitvoere. "We know that we'll have to service the market responsibly to unlock its value." He believes that the US market could offer substantial opportunities for South African grapefruit.

Riaan Ellis of Unifruitti concurs. "First impressions are very important so we need to gather the necessary intelligence about the market before sending volumes. But it's a huge step in the right direction."

Companies that have either already been sending citrus to the USA from farms in the Western and Northern Cape or multinationals who have subsidiaries in the USA will be able to quickly take advantage of the new opportunity. Exporters solely based in the north of the country say that it's difficult when you have already tied up all of your commitments for the season, to make changes midway through the season.



Trial shipments with citrus from the northern and eastern parts of South Africa will test the waters this season before large shipments start next year. The Citrus Growers Association's CEO, Justin Chadwick, and CGA director Vangile Titi (previously South African agricultural attachée in Washington DC) are on their way to the USA and unavailable for comment.

