

South Africa lodges WTO dispute over EU citrus import rules

The South African government has lodged a dispute with the World Trade Organization (WTO) over the EU's recently introduced regulations for citrus imports from the country.



The South African citrus industry has decried the new cold treatment protocol brought in a few weeks ago as unjustified and says it will greatly damage the sector and increase prices for European consumers.

On July 22 the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the UN and other International Organizations wrote to Joao Aguiar Machado, the EU Ambassador to the WTO in Geneva to request consultations with the EU concerning the new regulations, which the bloc says are aimed at addressing False Coddling Moth (FCM) interceptions from Southern African orange exports.

Justin Chadwick, CEO of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA), described the EU's Standing Committee on Plant, Animal, Food and Feed (SCOPAFF) new rules as "drastic and arguably misinformed".

"Despite numerous objections from several other countries, including European markets that currently import South African oranges, these new regulations were published in the Official Journal of the European Union with an implementation date of 14 July 2022," he said.

"The fact that EU authorities attempted to enforce these new regulations a mere 23 days after publication made it impossible for South African growers to ensure their compliance, and highlights how unjustified and discriminatory this legislation is, with devastating consequences to our local citrus industry."

He added that in terms of WTO agreements, members have agreed not to discriminate among imports from different origins, not to impose sanitary and technical barriers to trade that are discriminatory and not based on international standards or on sound scientific evidence.

"It is clear that the EU's protectionist FCM import measures against South Africa violate these conditions," Chadwick said. "In its request for consultations, South Africa identified 21 inconsistencies in the new proposed phytosanitary measures, against the guidelines of the WTO Agreement, which the EU is obligated to adhere to."

"These transgressions have already impacted an estimated 3.2 million cartons of citrus valued at R605 million (€38.4 million), with reports of hundreds of containers of South African citrus being detained by authorities in the EU on arrival. Without immediate political intervention, the threat remains that these consignments will be destroyed by EU authorities."

This crisis, he said, not only threatens the sustainability and profitability of local growers and the 140 000 jobs the industry sustains locally, but will also result in less and more expensive citrus in European supermarkets.

"We simply cannot allow, what was clearly nothing more than a politically motivated move by the Spanish, to decimate the businesses of thousands of local growers and the livelihoods they support, while threatening the destruction of millions of cartons of top-quality fruit by EU authorities," he said.

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