

"A disaster": South African citrus fruit trapped in European ports

After [South Africa filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) last month when the EU introduced new phytosanitary requirements, the trade dispute between the two parties continues.



The measures came into force in July when ships carrying hundreds of containers full of South African fruit bound for Europe were already at sea and now, tonnes of oranges are rotting in containers stuck in European ports and could be wasted, according to a [report by Euro news](#).

"This is a complete and utter disaster," Citrus Growers Association CEO Justin Chadwick told AFP. "Food of exceptional quality, which poses no risk, is just sitting there... It's really a disaster."

The new rules, which came at the height of the orange season, caught producers off guard. Some 3.2 million cartons of citrus fruit worth about €35 million (US\$36 million) were left with papers that were invalid on arrival.

Although the South African government rushed to issue new documents for shipments that met the new criteria, hundreds of containers had to be destroyed, according to Chadwick.

On one hand, South African growers say keeping the oranges at low temperatures is not necessary as the country already has more targeted means of preventing the infestation.

"The system we already have in place involves cold treatment, but targeted at risk, whereas the EU measure is a blanket measure that affects all oranges," said Chadwick.

In its WTO complaint, South Africa argues that the EU's requirements are "not based on science", "discriminatory" and excessive.

Moreover, "it will add costs. And right now, that's what no producer in the world can afford," added Hannes de Waal, who runs the almost century-old Sundays River Citrus farm in South Africa's southeast.

On the other hand, the EU has expressed confidence that its measures are "WTO compatible". A European Commission spokesperson said that the objective of the phytosanitary criteria is to protect the EU "from the potentially significant impact on agriculture and the environment, should this pest become established."

The dispute is now in the hands of the WTO. The parties have 60 days to negotiate a solution. Failing that, the complainant can request arbitration by a panel.