

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

SA meets with EU to clear blocked citrus exports

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Source: Fresh Fruit Portal

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) has negotiated a settlement to clear hundreds of citrus export containers that have been stuck in ports of entry across the European Union (EU).

SA orange exports have been rejected by ports in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden after the EU suddenly implemented new rules for the phytosanitary treatment of the fruit entering the region. More than 2 000 containers valued at an estimated R500 million have been affected by the blockage, according to the department.

After complaints had been escalated to the DALRRD, it said on Thursday that it had managed to clear containers and was working on ensuring the balance gained entry into one of South Africa's largest citrus export markets.

"To date we have managed to clear more than 300 of the 509 containers and we are processing clearance of the remaining containers," the department said.

The EU introduced new measures to regulate risk associated with False Codling Moth (FCM) on citrus fruit on June 21, which were set to come into force on June 24. These measures included amended additional phytosanitary declarations for grapefruit and soft citrus, and a revised cold treatment regime for oranges.

“This implied that consignments arriving in Europe from July 14 onwards needed to comply with the new measures. Taking the shortest sailing time to the EU, it meant that consignments that left South Africa on June 24, three days from the publication, should have been certified on the new measures,” the department said.

It added that it had written to and met with the European Commission (EC) to tell them that the implementation date for the new rules was “unreasonable”.

“At the time of the publication of the new measures, there were consignments that were certified and had already left for the EU, as well as some that were in the process of being exported. The DALRRD assertions were that changing the inspection and certification system within three days was unrealistic.

“The reasonable date relating to compliance with new measures would have been for consignments leaving SA on July 9, considering required adjustments of systems and communication to the different regulatory sites, which required at least three weeks from publication,” the department said.

It added that it had started receiving queries from exporters whose containers had been rejected at EU ports after the implementation date because EU authorities had demanded phytosanitary certificates compliant with the new FCM measures.

“The DALRRD segmented the cases into documentation regarding grapefruit and soft citrus, and cold treatment compliance on oranges. The impasse was subsequently addressed by replacing phytosanitary certificates with the correct additional declarations starting from July 22,” the department said.

However, the orange cases were still an issue until the industry presented possible equivalence measures regarding treatment applied to these consignments under SA’s existing system to deal with FCM.

The DALRRD committed to negotiating with the EU, asking it to consider these equivalent measures.

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