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Citrus growers appeal to Ramaphosa for scrapping of new EU rules

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The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has appealed to President Cyril Ramaphosa to intervene in the dispute between the local industry and the European Union (EU) after it recently announced drastic new import regulations.

The dispute emerged after the EU introduced new pre-import chilling rules for oranges, without sufficient warning, and when millions of cartons of citrus were already en route from southern Africa to the EU market. Reports of citrus containers being detained on arrival under the new rules had also heightened concerns, the CGA noted on Friday.

CGA chairman, Justin Chadwick, writing in his weekly newsletter, said the association had written to the president regarding the impact of the "drastic, misinformed and unjustified" new regulations requiring the cold treatment for oranges headed to the EU.

"This includes the fact that an estimated 3.2 million cartons of citrus valued at R605 million (€38.4 million) currently en route to the region could potentially be destroyed by authorities, in light of the new regulations being enforced from this week," Chadwick wrote.

Chadwick and several growers had raised concern that the new legislation, which had been implemented without sufficient notice and apparently without scientific justification, would have a “devastating impact” on the local citrus industry, in particular the 140 000 jobs it sustains.

“The CGA can confirm that it has received reports of containers being detained on arrival – in some cases not only oranges, but other citrus containers as well. This is why World Trade Organization law specifically requires a six-step process in the implementation of a new measure,” Chadwick said.

“The CGA remains hopeful that President Ramaphosa’s recent engagement with EU Council President Charles Michel will lead to the new regulations being abandoned, or at the very least delayed, until they can be properly reviewed. The CGA will continue engaging with the president and minister of agriculture, and Department of Trade, Industry and Competition on the matter,” Chadwick added.

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