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SA farmers want WTO dispute declared over EU citrus rules

Measures imposed by the EU require enhanced cold treatment for citrus exports due to concerns about False Codling Moth and Citrus Black Spot

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Picture: WERNER HILLS

SA citrus farmers want the government to lodge a complaint against the EU at the World Trade Organisation over the European bloc's citrus black spot regulations which they say threaten thousands of jobs.

The measures imposed by the EU in June 2022 require enhanced cold treatment for citrus exports due to concerns about False Codling Moth, a pest commonly found in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Citrus Black Spot (CBS), a fungal disease which leaves dark spots on fruit.

The EU's plant health rules could cut SA's orange exports to Europe by 20% this year, according to the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA).

SA's citrus industry says its current pest and disease control measures are highly effective and accuses the EU of protectionism.

Reuters has asked the EU and SA's trade department for comment. No other major citrus exporters have complained about the EU measures, which relate to pests and diseases that are most commonly found in SA.

SA farmers are battling electricity and logistics challenges and increased input costs and cannot absorb the additional R2bn annual cost for CBS risk management, Deon Joubert, the CGA's special envoy on market access and EU matters, said in a statement.

"The CGA calls on the SA government to work with the industry to put a stop to these CBS regulations and fight for jobs and revenue. Declaring a WTO dispute is truly a matter of urgency," Joubert said.

The CGA says the EU citrus market currently sustains a total of 70,000 jobs in SA, generating about \$800m annually in annual export earnings.

Last year, SA lodged its first WTO dispute complaint when it challenged the EU's phytosanitary requirements for imports of oranges and other citrus products related to the False Codling Moth.

Consultations are still under way over that complaint, according to the latest update on the WTO website.

Reuters

