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Citrus exports badly affected by problems caused by Transnet and Eskom

EU rules about False Codling Moth and fungal disease Citrus Black Spot will cost SA's citrus industry R3.7bn annually

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Picture: FREDLIN ADRIAAN

Citrus exports remained flat during the 2023 season, missing an industry target as SA's electricity and logistics problems worsened, the national growers' association said on Wednesday.

The world's second-biggest citrus exporter after Spain shipped 165.1-million cartons of fruit in the 2023 export season, an increase of less than 1% on 2022's figure, Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) president Justin Chadwick said in a statement.

The exports fell short of the CGA's forecast of 170-million cartons for the year due to persistent power cuts, which impacted irrigation, packing and cold storage, Chadwick said.

The underperformance of state-run freight rail and port utility Transnet, which has throttled commodity exports across the economy, also hobbled citrus shipments.

“Congestion at ports and a dysfunctional freight rail network has cost farmers dearly and is, in effect, halting growth opportunities for the citrus industry,” Chadwick said.

Chadwick said the EU’s regulations requiring enhanced cold treatment for citrus exports due to concerns over False Codling Moth, a pest commonly found in Sub-Saharan Africa, and fungal disease Citrus Black Spot, would cost SA’s citrus industry R3.7bn annually.

The EU is SA’s biggest export market, accounting for 33% of fruit shipments in 2022, followed by the Middle East with 19%.

The regulations have resulted in decreased orange exports to Europe, Chadwick said, predicting a further decline in 2024.

In 2022, SA lodged its first ever 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.

The CGA has also asked the government to lodge another WTO complaint against the EU over the citrus black spot regulations.

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