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Citrus growers urge government to intervene in EU orange import fight

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The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has written to Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition, Ebrahim Patel, as well as the Minister of Agriculture, Thoko Didiza, requesting an urgent update on interventions to resolve the orange import impasse with the European Union (EU).

The dispute concerns the recently introduced False Coddling Moth (FCM) regime governing the importation of South African oranges to the EU, which the CGA says is unnecessary and extremely costly for local growers to implement.

GCA CEO Justin Chadwick, said that despite months of consultations at the World Trade Organization (WTO), it appeared that very limited progress had been achieved.

As a result, it's unlikely to avert a "crisis" if growers must implement the rules before oranges start being shipped to Europe in less than two weeks' time.

"This includes an estimated £26 million in losses to growers and around 20% of oranges produced for Europe not being shipped this season.

"With the industry facing a number of serious headwinds over the past two years, including soaring farm input and shipping costs, power outages and operational issues

at ports, the 2023 season will be a make or break one for many growers," Chadwick said.

"These new regulations, if implemented when the season kicks off, could be the final nail in the coffin for many of them, as well as the thousands of jobs they support."

Chadwick said the CGA was grateful for the support shown by the government, but to safeguard the future sustainability of the industry and the 130 000 jobs it supports, it needed to take action before the end of April to avoid a crisis in the sector.

He said this should include calling for the establishment of a WTO panel to adjudicate on the matter.

"The CGA maintains the position that the unjustified, discriminatory, and scientifically flawed regulations are nothing more than a political move by Spanish producers to block South African citrus from entering the EU region," Chadwick said.

"It is critical that the national government draws a line in the sand within the next two weeks so we can put a stop to this looming crisis threatening the number one agricultural exporter in our country."

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