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South Africa challenges EU on citrus export restrictions

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Photo by: Bloomberg

South Africa has taken a preliminary step toward filing a complaint with the World Trade Organization

(WTO) against the European Union (EU) over its treatment of citrus imports from the country, people familiar with the situation said.

Two years ago, the EU imposed requirements for additional refrigeration of incoming fruit from South Africa, which lags behind only Spain as an exporter of the produce, to combat incidences of Citrus Black Spot, a fungal disease that leaves dark spots on fruit, and false codling moth, a pest found in South African orchards. Last year South Africa shipped \$644 million of citrus such as oranges, lemons, grapefruit and mandarins to the

EU, according to the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa.

The EU's moves increased costs and slashed shipments from South Africa, which competes with Spain for the citrus market. The African nation maintains that citrus black spot, while causing blemishes on the fruit skin, doesn't affect the quality. It has also said that shipments to Europe have been falsely classified as being tainted with the disease.

The EU has now been sent an official demand for consultations with South Africa over the measures that will be overseen by the WTO, the people said, asking not to be identified as a public statement is yet to be made. This is a step toward filing a case.

The dispute dates back to July 2022 with the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa last year saying that it would cost the industry over R500-million in lost exports as it couldn't access enough specialized refrigerated containers in time to get the fruit to the European market.

South Africa's trade department, the EU mission to South Africa and the WTO acknowledged requests for comment but are yet to respond.



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