

GLOBAL CITRUS SCAN (43)

John Edmonds (28 November 2013)



Citrus Growers Association (CGA)

Australian Citrus back South African exports to EU

Citrus Australia is urging the European Union to heed the findings of an international expert panel and continue accepting South African citrus. The call comes amid fears the EU will block South African citrus due to concern over the disease, citrus black spot, and disrupt long-established incident-free trade. Citrus Australia CEO Judith Damiani says that EU concerns that South African fruit may spread the disease to Europe were unfounded. "Earlier this year, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) came out saying that citrus imports posed an unacceptable risk to Europe's own industry due to concerns over citrus black spot. We knew that this was contrary to what others – including the United States Department of Agriculture – have found and we backed Australia's involvement in an international expert panel set up to consider the scientific facts." That panel drew together scientists from a range of citrus exporting nations, including Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and the United States, and found conclusively that citrus fruit is not a pathway for the transmission of citrus black spot. The risk assessment conducted by EFSA is also in contrast to the recent risk assessment conducted by the United States which concluded that fresh fruit is not a risk pathway. As a result, the first citrus exports from Uruguay to the United States recently arrived. "This only adds to our disappointment with the EU stance - given that leading US experts conducted a very thorough examination of the risk and arrived at a very different conclusion," says Judith. "While Europe is currently a minor market for Australia, the principle here is very important - any measures placed on the trade in fruit should be based on sound science and in this case it appears that the EU position on citrus black spot is not technically justified. "We therefore urge EFSA to base all its future decisions solely on internationally accepted science."

[www.citrusaustralia.com.au; 25 November 2013]

Israel turns to easy-peelers for citrus advantage

While the market for mandarins is growing in Europe, there's another reason Israeli growers are increasingly focusing on easy peeling citrus varieties... Especially in the face of increasing competition from Spanish and Moroccan growers on oranges, which give an advantage to growers with low input costs, Israeli growers are turning to mandarins as their citrus crop of choice. "Citrus growers have a problem with oranges in Israel because they're easier to grow in places like Egypt, Morocco and Spain," said Dr. Nir Carmi of the Volcani Institute in Israel. "We don't have cheap labour or free water, so we can't compete on price with oranges, so we can't focus on them." The Volcani Institute is the research arm of the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture, and the staff there works on innovations that benefit the nation's growers. But when it comes to citrus, Carmi said they know they must focus on crops where Israeli growers can compete, and that happens to be mandarins and other varieties of easy peeling fruit. "Mandarins are hard to grow," said Carmi. "So if we make them easier to grow we won't have to compete with growers in places with cheap labour and easy access to water." Israel's technological advantage comes to the fore with a commodity like mandarins where breakthroughs in growing techniques can have a big impact. For that reason, and the tastes of European consumers who prefer easy peeling citrus, Volcani is focusing their citrus research on mandarins. "The first problem we had to overcome was that mandarins are an alternate-year crop," said Carmi. That means production could soar one year only to fall the next. Due to the exigencies of the modern global market, that's not optimal for citrus exporters. Through selective breeding, Carmi and his fellow researchers were able to come up with an Orri mandarin with even annual production, a lack of seeds and a production of at least 30 tonnes per hectare. The taste, he added, is also superior to all previous varieties. For that reason, it's now the variety of choice for Israel's citrus growers and it's the variety from which most of their citrus research has been based. Part of that work has involved bestowing desirable traits to new varieties of mandarins. "We're developing a new mandarin that has anthocyanin, an antioxidant that was previously found in blood oranges," said Carmi. "I've talked to people in European markets who tell me this would be a trait that's very important, as it's a more powerful antioxidant than lycopene." Working with Italian researchers, they're now crossing their mandarins with blood oranges to get the desired taste and nutritional content. The season for mandarins in Israel stretches from January to March, but there's work to extend that season with varieties that can be grown and harvested outside of that window. Additionally, Carmi's colleagues are grafting mandarin scions to rootstock with deeper roots. The idea is that deeper roots will make it easier for growers to produce mandarins with less water. Environmental concerns also play a part in the direction of ongoing research, as warmer summers have caused cracking. Researchers are working on varieties that can stand up to increasing heat without cracking as well as on citrus that's resistant to the big threat of HLB. Citrus greening has hit growers in Florida especially hard, and Volcani researchers know it's just a matter of time before all citrus growers around the world will have to contend with the disease. Because it's such an important issue, Carmi said they're employing all resources to find a solution to the HLB problem, even if it involves genetically-modified fruit... Aside from mandarins, their work also touches upon other citrus varieties. Carmi pointed to the declining consumption of grapefruit among the elderly population as something they've worked on. Because many older consumers take statins to regulate their cholesterol levels, they avoid grapefruit, which can interfere with their medication. The task there is to develop a grapefruit that doesn't have the compounds that interfere with cholesterol medication. Carmi noted that American researchers have developed such a fruit, but he believes the variety they're working on is better. "There's competition there from Americans," said Carmi. "But, based on what I've heard, it seems like ours tastes better."

[Freshplaza.com; 25 November 2013]

If you need more information on any of these issues, or if there is anything else that CGA can assist with, please contact us at 031 7652514, or [john@cga.co.za](mailto:johne@cga.co.za)

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