Global Citrus Scan (2019_6)

(John Edmonds 14 March 2019) Citrus Growers Association (CGA)

Record citrus crop once more

The first southern African citrus forecast of the season shows that the third successive record export crop in a row will be exported this year. However, while the two previous years saw steep increases, this year's volume will only be marginally higher than the previous campaign…The South African Citrus Growers Association (CGA) announced at its grower conference in Port Elizabeth that close to 137m cartons would be exported this year to no less than 100 countries…This year's export forecast, which included citrus shipped from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, showed an increase of 0.7 per cent compared with last year's volume. "The citrus industry has enjoyed two record crops for the export market in succession. Last year's crop yielded a revenue of nearly R19bn," said Justin Chadwick, CEO of the CGA. The CGA said the soft citrus and lemon categories were mainly responsible for the recent growth in exports. "However, the net growth in these categories is off-set against a 3 per cent decline in Valencia oranges." Valencia oranges is southern Africa's largest citrus export category, contributing 39 per cent to the total volumes, followed by Navel oranges (20 per cent), lemons (16 per cent), soft citrus (13 per cent) and grapefruit (12 per cent). Chadwick said the increase was due to the resilience of the citrus industry and its ability to adapt to technological changes and overcome challenges. "Our local citrus industry is one of the country's most important fruit groups because of the value and volume it contributes to exports. It yields a revenue of over R20bn every year of which 92 per cent comes from exports. This provides work to more than 100 000 people," he said.

[www.fruitnet.com/fpj; 13 March 2019]

Govt official: South Africa prepares to launch a WTO dispute over EU's CBS measures

The biannual summit of the South African citrus industry is taking place in the coastal city of Port Elizabeth, a gathering of over 600 delegates that brings together all the links of the citrus chain in a holistic way, from farm to market…The summit started off on a brisk trot as deputy director-general at the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Mooketsa Ramasodi, announced in his opening address that South Africa was preparing to launch a formal dispute through the World Trade Organisation…"The citrus industry has faced the full force of the hurdles which might be placed in the path of free trade. For about thirty years, South Africa has been engaging the European Union on the EU's import legislation for citrus black spot. Based on South African research, and general research in the world, South Africa considers this requirement to be unjustifiably strict because fruit is a negligible pathway for the disease to be spread. In 2010, South Africa contested the CBS import measures through the dispute resolution process of the International Plant Protection Convention. Regrettably there has been very little progress, as we have now formally received industry's request for South Africa to withdraw from the IPPC process." "In 2013, South Africa raised a trade concern about the EU import requirements at the WTO Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures in Geneva, Switzerland," Mr Ramasodi continued. "In 2016, the EU implemented emergency measures on CBS. These were to expire at the end of March 2019. However, according to a media release by the European Commission, on 22 February 2019, these measures are said to be prolonged, which is very regrettable. These are expected to be for another three years. Compliance comes at an estimated annual cost of R1.8 billion [approximately 112 million euros] to the South African citrus producer…"The matter was discussed at presidential level at the South Africa-EU summit in November last year and again in February this year between Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies and the European trade commissioner Cecilia Malmström. "None of South Africa's technical and political interventions on CBS has produced the desired outcome. As a result, South Africa is currently preparing to launch a formal dispute through the WTO dispute settlement procedure." Despite the extremely restrictive phytosanitary conditions under which South Africa's citrus trade with Europe takes place, he said, South Africa's trade there amounted to 599,000 tonnes during the 2018 export season. "Often the EU argues that this figure does not support South Africa's contention that it is hurt by the CBS measures but, clearly, this argument disregards the cost of compliance."

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HLB in South Africa: "It's not if, but when"

The South African industry should be very concerned about Asian greening disease, Dr Vaughan Hattingh, CEO of Citrus Research International, told delegates of the recent citrus summit in Port Elizabeth (right). The South African arrival of the disease, also called huanglongbing (HLB), is not a case of if, but rather when. "When you get the Asian citrus psyllid, the writing's on the wall. HLB will follow and there is no remedy for HLB and none on the near horizon. There is no sustainable management strategy. HLB will change the citrus landscape in South Africa, without a doubt." His sang-froid is based on the Brazilian, Californian and Texan experience of Asian greening disease. The psyllid had been present in Brazil for 62 years when the first incidence of the disease was reported in 2004. The country pulled back on what was set to follow the gloomy Florida narrative and has since managed, despite a loss of over 52 million trees and a quarter of its citrus hectares, to keep HLB under check through hypervigilance applied in a collective manner – something with which the South African citrus industry is well acquainted…The vector of the disease, the Asian citrus psyllid (Diaphorina citri), was in 2015 detected in Tanzania, the following year in Kenya and is known to occur in Réunion and Mauritius…The bacteria itself has been detected in Ethiopia nine years ago and again in 2014…" Huanglongbing is an unusual combination and, scientists think, a recent association between the bacteria and the plant and therefore there has been little co-evolution and the result is that the pathogen kills its host, the plant. Researchers have never been able to cultivate the bacteria in medium and it is not a conventional pathogen. HLB differs from African greening disease in its higher heat tolerance and its fatality to trees. It is a lot more severe than African greening disease which is present in South Africa, and traps are not very attractive for monitoring of the vector.

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