



Communiqué de presse

Plant Health: Commission strengthens rules on citrus fruit imports from South Africa

Stricter import requirements for South African citrus fruit were today endorsed by Member State experts¹. These emergency measures are being taken to protect European crops from citrus black spot, a harmful plant disease not native to Europe.

According to the new measures, citrus fruits imported from South Africa will be subject to more stringent criteria such as recording pre and post-harvest chemical treatments and mandatory registration of packing houses as well as on-site official inspections at citrus orchards. A sample of at least 600 of each type of citrus fruit per 30 tonnes will need to be taken by the South African authorities. All fruit showing symptoms will be tested. Moreover, a sample per 30 tonnes of 'Valencia' oranges will also be tested. No distinction between citrus fruits for fresh consumption and citrus fruits for processing is made.

Commissioner for Health, Tonio Borg said: "Plant protection on EU territory is of the utmost importance and the EU had no choice but to impose a stricter inspection regime for South African citrus fruit. Systematic sampling and testing of consignments should prevent this harmful plant disease from taking hold in Europe's citrus orchards to the detriment of our farming sector. We had to take these measures because of the high number of recent interception of infected citrus fruits at European border controls."

Today's measures are also based on a recent European Food Safety Authority's pest risk assessment.

The aim is to prevent the disease from entering the EU and affecting the EU's citrus black spot free status. The introduction of citrus black spot into the EU would pose a serious threat to the EU's citrus producing areas, mainly found in Southern Europe. During the 2013 export season (from April to November) around 600 000 tonnes of citrus fruit were imported from South Africa. This represents approximately one third of the EU's total import of citrus fruit, with oranges being the main citrus commodity.

Next steps

The measures will be adopted by the Commission in the coming days. In the event that recurring interceptions of citrus fruit contaminated with citrus black spot are

detected in the coming months, these measures will be further strengthened and additional restrictions may be imposed.

Background

Citrus black spot is a harmful fungal disease caused by *Phyllosticta citricarpa* (McAlpine) Van der Aa. The disease attacks citrus plants causing high losses to citrus fruit production, but is not contagious for humans.

Today's measures will apply for this year's growing season and strengthens the safeguards that have been in place for the last growing season. They are a follow-up to the restrictions taken at EU level in November 2013 which applied to citrus fruit imports for the growing season 2012-2013, which have since lapsed.

Source : <http://europa.eu/>

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