

South African fruit exports to Russia declining

The 14th session of the Joint Intergovernmental Committee on trade and economic co-operation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa (ITEC) will be conducted in Pretoria on 16-18 November, 2016.

The current problems affecting bilateral trade will be the subject of discussions during the ITEC. Fruit trade between Russia and South Africa has been under severe stress in the last two years.

According to statistics of the Federal Customs Service of Russia for 2015, the import of oranges from South Africa decreased by 40% in comparison with 2014. This year, export of SA citrus into Russia will fall even further. This is happening in spite of the countries' leaders calling for increased fruit trade between them. In the opinion of South African and Russian businesses, the main reason for the drop in SA fruits imports to Russia was the introduction, by the Russian side, of a trade barrier in the form of a special mandatory EAC transport marking from February 2015.

By itself the marking does not contain any impossible requirements. The marking (it should be in Russian) describes the name of the product (apple or orange), country of origin, producer, exporter, importer – which is something already written in shipping documents (Bill of Lading, Certificate of Origin, Phytosanitary Certificate), but in English. It is also required to specify the period of validity of the product which is nonsense for fruits: an apple can survive a full year's storage or rot after a couple of weeks if bitten by a worm. Such a sticker can be printed by South Africans, but often with mistakes, because Russian is not a dispersed language in the country. What is worse is that the EAC sticker must be affixed on each carton, but this does not fit with the technology of fruit preparation and sending them for export adopted in South Africa.

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