

Risks from Argentine lemon access “fully evaluated”, says USDA

The Californian citrus industry recently described the decision to grant U.S. market access to lemons from Northwest Argentina as a “callous disregard” for farmers, but a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) spokesperson has emphasized there is no cause for concern.

The U.S. Animal and Plant Health Service (APHIS) announced the decision on Dec. 20, in spite of strong industry opposition.

The final rule will apply a systems approach to treating quarantine pests and comes after the agency allowed an extra 120 days for the public to submit comments on the proposed arrangement.

Following the announcement, the California Citrus Mutual (CCM) distributed a press release about the development with the headline “USDA Delivers Lump of Coal to California Lemon Growers for Christmas”, accusing the USDA of “blatantly ignoring” comments from scientists and technical advisors.

However, in a statement sent to www.freshfruitportal.com, USDA-APHIS public affairs specialist Yindra Dixon said extensive work had been carried out over the last decade to ensure the U.S. agricultural industry would not be put at risk.

“Over the last 10 years, APHIS has thoroughly reviewed Argentina’s citrus production and packing practices and fully evaluated pest and other risks to U.S. agriculture,” she said.

“The review included a comprehensive pest risk assessment which was amended several times to account for new scientific information and address public comments. It also included site visits in 2007, 2015, and most recently in September 2016 to observe production areas, packing practices, and trace back abilities.

“Based on our scientific risk assessment, the availability of effective risk mitigations, and because there are no remaining unresolved plant health concerns, APHIS is publishing a final

rule amending the regulations to allow the importation of this commodity under a systems approach.”

Dixon added a timeline for when the lemons may reach the U.S. market was difficult to determine as it was contingent upon agreement to all of the terms of the operational work plan, as well as confirmation that all of the requirements have been met.

“Publishing the final rule is one of several steps that must be completed before Argentina may begin shipping lemons to the United States,” Dixon said.

“APHIS and Argentina’s National Plant Protection Organization (SENASA) must now finalize and sign the operational work plan, which details the conditions Argentina must meet for every U.S.-bound lemon shipment.

“Additionally, SENASA will have to collect and APHIS will have to verify six months of fruit fly trapping data. APHIS will also have to verify that packinghouses have met the safeguarding requirements outlined in the operational work plan.”

Lien article : <http://www.freshfruitportal.com/news/2017/01/05/risks-from-argentine-lemon-access-fully-evaluated-says-usda/>