

EU makes five pest detections in South African citrus during June

The news is “highly disappointing” for an industry that has implemented “meticulous” measures and protocols for 2017.

Five interceptions of the false codling moth (FCM) were detected in South African citrus consignments in the European Union (EU) during June, despite robust industry protocols and measures for the season.

Citrus Growers Association (CGA) of Southern Africa special envoy for market access and EU matters, Deon Joubert, issued a statement on the detections which all took place in France.

“We knew the growing conditions for citrus in 2017 were much more challenging than in 2016. This implied all our stakeholders would need to be vigilant in managing the EU crop this year to keep interceptions of both FCM and CBS [citrus black spot] in check,” he said.

“The Europhyt report for end May 2017 still reflected SA with zero citrus FCM and CBS non-conformance records, which were great, but that has unfortunately changed with the end June 2017 report stating 5 FCM interceptions in Foss – France on SA Citrus.

“This is highly disappointing, especially considering the meticulous CGA measures and protocols for 2017, issued through the Commodity Focus Groups.”

Joubert added these protocols had not been followed in the “large majority” of FCM interception cases.

He also highlighted that apart from “a few scares and outstanding verifications”, there had as yet been no registered CBS interceptions this season, which he attributed to “excellent work” being done by all.

However, he pointed out the industry’s traditional higher risk period for the fungal disease came during August to October.

“This is when Valencias are the main variety in the market – and that packing has just commenced a few weeks ago,” he said.

“So please remain diligent in applying all risk mitigating measures. We do not want to forfeit the excellent plant health position on CBS, that we have attained over the past 3 seasons.”

Possible protocol gaps

There had been a couple of warnings and scares on FCM during the early part of the campaign in the EU, according to Joubert, but he said in most cases it had been a case wrongful identification or the larvae being dead on inspection – meaning the measures were successful.

This boded well for the “rigorous” FCM measures adopted by most in the industry, he explained.

“Unfortunately now that we have the 5 confirmed FCM interceptions in France, analysing these interceptions are critical to close the loop on possible gaps in our measures and protocols,” he said.

“The CGA has set up a task team with the assistance of CRI [Citrus Research International], who will analyse all FCM interception cases in the EU with DAFF’s [Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries] able assistance. We need to learn as much about our vector pattern, possible mistakes and successes, while applying all the already known FCM measures but testing some experimental ones, during the 2017 season.

“This to build a reputable FCM risk management system this year for submission through DAFF to the EU Commission before year end.”

While the recent interceptions are “concerning”, Joubert requested all measures still be followed for the remainder of the season.

“This will afford us some last minute analysing and possible sensible elimination of risk factors, while working through the reporting of non-compliances/strikes [this way the strikes at least provide some value],” he said.

Threat on the horizon

Joubert expects FCM will be a notifiable disease as of next season in the EU.

“This was an extremely volatile process and SA had to draw on all its resources towards the end of last year to keep the pending EU legislation from just becoming a “shut-out” for SA citrus,” he said.

“Through meticulous planning, collaboration with all interested groups, organising WTO [World Trade Organization] legal and policy submissions, suggesting workable alternatives and lastly very strong

support from friends and contacts in the EU, we were able to get a text going into legislation on FCM, which will not be easy for SA but workable.”

It was therefore essential to have the entire South Africa citrus industry’s full support to finalize a workable competent FCM risk management system for 2018, he said.

He said while the news was actually just a registration of FCM interceptions on the South African citrus industry’s record, it would probably “add to political pressure and mischief”.

“It’s perhaps also opportune to remember that the Spanish insistence was mandatory Cold Treatment on all SA citrus going to the EU.

“That cost and logistical requirements would imply a total disaster for the SA Citrus Industry [so we have to make our current FCM arrangements work]. This threat remains on the horizon should we fail on the current process.”

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