

South Africa: Stone fruit & pomegranate sectors prepare for new EU regulations

The new EU regulations regarding false codling moth won't only be applicable to citrus, but will affect peach, nectarine, pomegranate and capsicum exports from South Africa as well.

The stone fruit industry has finalised its draft protocols to manage the new FCM regulations and orchards have already been registered with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) for EU exports. The start of the stone fruit season isn't far off, although the regulation only kicks in on 1 January 2018, so they've had to move quickly, says Mariëtte Kotze, group operations manager at HORTGRO.

As with the citrus industry, the stone fruit industry's protocol will focus on a pre-emptive systems approach in the orchard and packhouse, based on scouting and monitoring as well as strategies like mating disruption, orchard sanitation and targeted control measures. Fortunately stone fruit is seen as a low-risk crop. Inspection points at packhouse delivery as well as endpoint inspection rounds up the Peach & Nectarine FCM Management System.

The pomegranate industry has also based its protocols on the principles of a systems approach to ensure consignment freedom from FCM.

Encouragingly, Brent Geddes of pomegranate producer Pomona has in recent years noticed a dramatic decrease in the incidence of FCM. "Over the last two years we have had hardly any moths at all," he says, a phenomenon broadly evident in the Western and Northern Cape, concurs Jack Wittles, chairperson of the pomegranate producers' association (POMOSA).

The decrease in FCM is a result of close collaboration between stone fruit, citrus and pomegranate farmers in the Western Cape, where monitoring along with strategies like mating disruption, coupled with synchronised spraying programmes across farms in some areas, seem to be having an effect.

According to overseas research, pomegranates cannot be subjected to cold treatment, with pomegranates of the 'Wonderful' cultivar tolerating shipping temperatures of no lower than 5°C while 'Herskovitz' and 'Akko' are sensitive to temperatures below 8°C. The South African industry will do its own trials on the cold tolerance of pomegranates at temperatures of 1°C and 2°C for the duration of the shipping period (16 days and more) this coming season.

Jack Wittles says that at least half of South Africa's pomegranates go to the EU and the UK, with the balance destined for the Middle East, Far East, Africa and Indian Ocean islands. While the organisation is waiting for figures on the exact volumes produced during the past season, there was an estimated increase of 15%, despite the drought.

Pomegranate trees in the Western Cape are currently in leaf and flowering will start within the next few weeks.

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