

EU steps up monitoring of horticulture imports

- **The EU has amended its policy on the maximum residue levels (MRLs) by lowering permissible limits in food produce.**
- **The move comes soon after the EU put Kenya back on the blacklist of countries using high levels of pesticides.**
- **The stringent EU regulations could result in significant decline of exports particularly beans and peas from Kenya.**

Stringent regulations on the use of farm chemicals are locking out fresh produce exporters in East Africa from the lucrative European Union market.

The EU, which is the leading importer of horticulture produce particularly from Kenya, has amended its policy on the maximum residue levels (MRLs) by lowering permissible limits in food produce.

The move comes soon after the EU put Kenya back on the blacklist of countries using high levels of pesticides.

“We are witnessing an increase in interceptions of consignments because of the new regulations,” Hosea Machuki, Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya chief executive told The EastAfrican.

This means the country has to increase monitoring and surveillance.

Citing risk assessment, the EU lowered the MRLs for several pesticides allowed for produce entering its market, particularly those used in citrus fruits and bananas.

The new MRL limits have been set at 0.01 milligrammes per kilogramme (mg/kg) against the international standard that sets an MRL level of 2.0 mg/kg. New requirements on beans and peas are waiting ratification before coming into effect in January.

East Africa exporters will feel the pinch because to make the cut, exporters and their EU importing agencies must pay \$1,212 per consignment for inspection.



Repeated failure to adhere to the set limits on toxin residue often result in licence cancellation.

This year, three Kenyan firms have been locked out of the electronic certification system domiciled at the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service blocking them from exporting to the bloc.

The stringent EU regulations could result in significant decline of exports particularly beans and peas from Kenya as produce will be subjected to 10 per cent sampling up from five per cent starting in January.

Petition tabled

The EU has set different levels for each country. For Uganda, for instance, 50 per cent of chillies entering the bloc must be subjected to sampling after the country failed to comply to EU warnings due to high case of interceptions of chillies with false codling moth.

“The EU is becoming strict and if you do not comply with set limits they increase the surveillance,” added Ojepati Okesegere, Fresh Producers Consortium of Kenya chief executive.

But while the East African nations have been silent on the EU’s decision to lower the maximum residue levels, several countries including Côte d’Ivoire, Brazil, India, the US and others have protested and gone ahead to present a formal complaint to the World Trade Organisation.

“The government needs to join other countries to lobby against these regulations to protect the horticulture industry,” said Mr Machuki.

Kenya’s Uasin Gishu County Woman Representative Gladys Shollei has tabled a petition in parliament seeking a ban on chemicals importation on the basis that the volume of imported pesticides, herbicides and fungicides had more than doubled in four years from 6,400 tonnes in 2015 to 15,600 tonnes in 2018.

“We can’t avoid using pesticides when production is on the rise but we need to produce responsibly and comply with regulations,” said Mr Okesegere.

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