

SCOPAFF article - Agbiz Newsletter

SA citrus exporters await developments with regard to SCOPAFF committee decision

South African citrus exporters are closely watching the possible endorsement this week on 19 or 20 May of a draft amendment of a European Union (EU) Implementing Regulation 2019/2072 regarding the import requirements of *Thaumatotibia leucotreta* (false codling moth, or FCM) on citrus from third countries, South Africa being one of them. This draft is currently still before the European Commission's Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF), Plant Health Section.

This issue is that the draft amendment includes a mandatory requirement that all oranges from third countries in Africa and Israel be subjected to cold treatment for a minimum of 16 days at a temperature between 0 and -1 degrees C. The regulatory change threatens the more than EUR 1 billion citrus trade between Europe and South Africa. The risks of supply disruptions for European consumers are high as well, given that the SA exports comprise the most important source of citrus for the EU during the European summer. Ironically, given EU consumer preference for choice, the regulatory change will de facto prevent the import of all organic and non-chemically treated oranges.

South Africa has actively sought to highlight during public consultations the lack of scientific basis for the proposed amendment, with the number of finds from FCM not showing an upward trend. In fact, the number of finds in oranges is decreasing. Since FCM was declared an EU quarantine plague three years ago, 19 (2019), 14 (2020) and 15 (2021) interceptions respectively were made across the 800 000 tonnes of citrus imports to the EU annually. This can be compared to other product groups where significantly lower trade volumes involve more finds. In addition, FCM interceptions from other importing countries have similarly been much higher - with 53, 129 and 58 interceptions over the same period. Yet without similar focus. Consultation, which usually further takes place with the South African National Plant Protection Organisation before such new regulations being filed at the World Trade Organisation, did not occur. A record number of opposing submissions have been made by growers and importers from a number of EU countries. It has been stated by producers that alternative, available time-temperature protocols, with proven efficacy, do exist, enshrined in the EU FCM risk management system and the draft recognised IPPC ISMP standards. Roughly R 3.4 billion is spent annually to ensure compliance with EU plant health regulations on FCM across SA.

The expected vote on the measure in late April was subsequently delayed by SCoPAFF for more consultation till 19/20 May. The European Commission's Plant Health Unit noted that trading partners had been submitting alternative methods and solutions, which need to be assessed for efficacy. As it is a permanent horizontal measure and not an emergency measure, the EC further noted it is normal for discussion to continue. It appears that adjustments to the draft text are indeed being considered, to address scientific concerns raised. This news will hopefully be confirmed this week and will be met with great relief by a 100-year-old trade and the 140 000, mostly rural jobs reliant on it.