

**PRESS STATEMENT BY DEON JOUBERT
SPECIAL ENVOY: MARKET ACCESS & EU MATTERS – CITRUS GROWERS' ASSOCIATION OF
SOUTHERN AFRICA**

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**UNFAIR EUROPEAN REGULATIONS ON CBS WILL ROB CITRUS INDUSTRY OF THOUSANDS
OF JOBS AND REVENUE – SA MUST LODGE A WTO DISPUTE**

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has requested President Ramaphosa to urgently intervene, and halt unfair trade regulations enforced by the European Union (EU) on our local citrus industry, in particular their discriminatory trade regulations on Citrus Black Spot (CBS), which is threatening thousands of jobs in the sector.

The CGA and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural development (DALRRD) and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) have worked together for over ten years to put a stop to the CBS regulations but unfortunately the EU has continued to enforce rules that are unscientific and irrational. The situation has now become so serious that substantial losses in jobs and revenue are on the horizon unless immediate action is taken.

It is critical that the South African government draws a line in the sand and calls for an official World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute with the EU on their CBS regulations.

The industry has continued to raise the fact that CBS is a cosmetic issue that only effects a miniscule percentage of fruit exported, as a result of South Africa's world-class control measures. Even though there is conclusive evidence that citrus fruit without leaves is not a pathway for the spread of CBS, the EU has continued to enforce these unreasonable measures. The EU is the only overseas market holding this position on CBS. Other markets acknowledge that the risk of establishment and spread of the disease through trade in fresh fruit is completely negligible.

It is clear that the EU restrictions are nothing more than a protectionist impulse. Through their actions they are blocking South African citrus to unfairly benefit their own members, specifically the Spanish citrus industry. The South African government is on record that the EU regulations on CBS is a trade restrictive measure and not a plant health issue.

Local citrus growers nevertheless have had to implement a comprehensive CBS risk management programme over the past few years. The Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) has quantified the cost of CBS risk management for the EU market in excess of R2 billion per year. This is completely beyond our industry's financial ability. Our growers are already under pressure due to the electricity and logistics crises the country is currently experiencing and the major hike in input costs over the past two years.

If the EU market situation is not addressed, jobs and livelihoods will be lost. The EU citrus market currently sustains a total of 70 000 jobs and generates R15 billion in foreign earnings.

So far this season the EU has claimed a number of interceptions of CBS. However, a pattern of erroneous classifications of CBS has been established. In Belgium and Portugal CBS tests have proven to be unreliable and have resulted in false positives. For instance, Portugal claims a CBS interception from amongst Western Cape fruit, while this province has been proven to be completely free of the pest. This type of action suggests an established agenda to block South African trade and the CGA is in the process of raising formal objections to these interceptions at an EU level.

If the EU should close off their citrus market because of these spurious CBS interceptions, our citrus industry, and by extension our rural economy, will suffer further losses.

Time is running out for our growers, who are already feeling the extreme market pressures. The CGA calls on the South African government to work with the industry to put a stop to these CBS regulations and fight for South African jobs and revenue. Declaring a WTO dispute is truly a matter of urgency.

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