

REPORT

—South Africa



Lemon diplomacy in action

DURBAN—South Africa's decision to stop its own organic lemon shipments to the EU is a gesture of goodwill, according to the country's special envoy.

by Carl Collen

South Africa's decision to keep its organic lemons out of the European Union this year is regarded as a short-term measure, one designed to avoid unnecessary risks at a time when the country is hoping to sort out its wider dispute with the EU over handling of the citrus black spot (CBS) issue. It has become clear, however, that trade leaders in South Africa still believe that their only option in terms of resolving the matter will be to pursue it further at the World Trade Organisation.

"It makes no sense for us to introduce or increase our efforts to limit the risk as long as the EU continues with its present way of handling the CBS matter," says Deon Joubert, the South African citrus industry's special envoy to the EU.

Joubert explains that the South African delegation that visited the EU towards the end of March looked to engage all stakeholders and the EC regarding South Africa's industry plans for 2016. The trip was also used to take stock of the country's CBS performance over the past few

seasons and gauge the developments and sentiments in Europe. "Suffice to say that the SA count on CBS, which reduced from 35 (in 2013), 28 (in 2014) to 15 (in 2015) was unilaterally applauded as a job well done," Joubert continues.

He adds that grower efforts on CBS had come at a cost of R1bn to the South African citrus industry, underlining a high level of compliance, regardless of the fact that scientists from around the world have concluded that there was no risk of CBS being transferred from South African fruit to European orchards. CGA growers have also exceeded requirements and taken bold decisions to stop commodities or suspend exports when viewed as necessary.

GOOD LEVEL OF CO-OPERATION

The South African citrus industry was generally pleased with the level of co-operation seen from individual EU countries and their inspection services during 2015, according to Joubert. This included full access to each CBS interception dossier and the viability tests conducted on those interceptions. As a result, South African officials had been able to analyse each case and improve the country's risk management system. Visits to member states' laboratories by a South African technical delegation under the competent leadership of DAFF during 2015 had also further enhanced confidence on both sides. "In the same spirit the SA citrus industry has decided to announce that organic South African lemons would not be exported to the EU this year as part of a core of responsible conduct from our SA grower fraternity," Joubert outlines.

The decision had been taken voluntarily by the organic lemon producers, despite the cost to them. "There is not really a market outside the UK and the EU which can take up this fruit and it will have to be sold in general lemon markets, perhaps at lower prices. However, this will also allow them to further work on risk-mitigating measures of CBS in their product range, while significantly reducing the risk of SA CBS interceptions in Europe during 2016. South Africa is confident that all these measures will once again result in Europe experiencing SA citrus during 2016 for its most well-known characteristics, namely quality fruit of superior taste and supporting a healthy lifestyle." **E**

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 ABOVE—The organic lemon decision has been made with the future in mind