

CITRUS

## South African citrus exports to the US will have to wait

South African citrus producers farming in areas where citrus black spot disease (CBS) is a problem will most likely have to wait another year until after the US elections before they can export citrus to that country. This is according to Piet Smit, vice-chairperson of the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA).

Currently, South Africa was allowed to export fruit from CBS-free areas only, said Smit. Although the US had agreed in principle about a year ago that other regions would in future also be able to export citrus to that country, South Africa was still waiting for new regulations that would make this possible.

It looked as if the US had been too busy with other matters, such as the Agoa negotiations and the elections, to give its full attention to the creation of such new regulations, Smit said.

with high risks and the highest phytosanitary requirements of all South Africa's export countries, according to Smit.

"It's expensive to export to this market, so you have to ensure you do everything right or you'll end up losing money. Exporters to this market also have to realise that they're competing directly with cheap American summer fruit and that the Americans are very patriotic about their own produce."

The US's Floridian industry had suffered a severe blow over the past ten or so years due to Asiatic Greening disease. According to a recent report from the CGA, the disease had, since 1997, caused a 71% decline in citrus production in that state. In the report, Bruce McEvoy, CGA representative in the US, said that the disease had resulted in "abandoned

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"It seems the US is very proactive when it comes to protecting their own interests, as was seen in the aggressive way in which they forced South Africa to create new regulations to allow poultry, pork and beef exports to South Africa," he said. "But when it comes to matters that won't benefit them directly, such as this, they seem to take their time."

He said that the US might want to first settle the Agoa deal before entering into new negotiations with South Africa, but that the bottom line was that areas with CBS were likely to be banned from the market in 2016.

While the US was a high-paying market, it was also associated

groves, idle processing plants, closed packing facilities and empty seats at the baseball stadium that once hosted citrus agents from Japan and Asia."

Asiatic Greening disease, a bacterial disease, was a threat internationally that had thankfully not yet been observed in South Africa, Smit said.

The decline in production in Florida, however, did not create greater market opportunities for South African citrus, as citrus cannot be stored like apples.

"We supply the market during the US off-season, in their summer. We won't be able to supply them during their winter," he said. — *Glennis Kriel*