

Controversial changes to cold treatment of Southern African citrus pushed through



An extraordinary session of the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF) of the European Commission yesterday approved changes to the cold treatment for oranges imported from third party countries where false codling moth *Thaumatotibia leucotreta* is present, Intercitrus, the Spanish citrus growers' association, has reported. It predominantly affects South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The Citrus Growers' Association of South Africa has for the moment no comment on these reports.

The Spanish Minister of Agriculture, Luis Planas, yesterday in a tweet called it a "great step forward for our producers", thanking the European Commission for their work.

Previously it had been reported that Spain expressed its displeasure that the measure had not been approved last Friday and Minister Planas had personally insisted that the European Union takes an immediate decision on cold treatment. The decision will be processed urgently, Intercitrus continues, "so that it enters into force before the end of June".

The South African citrus industry had vigorously contested the proposed measures, calling into question the scientific grounds of a harsher cold protocol while arguing it would be detrimental to fruit quality. It repeatedly put forward the case that its own comprehensive false codling moth management system (FMS), spanning from orchard through to shipping, had been effective in managing the risk of the pest which became a quarantine pest in 2018.

South Africa had argued that some of the FCM interceptions made last year on the 800,000 tonnes of citrus sent to the EU was as a result of the breakdown in the cold chain due to the civil unrest in July, but that their research into the pest and their approach to its management, remained sound.

Two options available by next year, says Spanish professional body

According to Intercitrus, the European Commission will demand a precooling at 5 degrees at the port of departure and a treatment in transit at between -1 and 2 degrees for 25 days. "And by 2023 it will be allowed to choose between two options: a cold treatment between -1 and 0 degrees for 16 days or another between -1 and 2 degrees for 20 days."

In both cases, oranges for export to the EU would be required to precool at 0 degrees and 2 degrees, respectively, the organisation states. The current protocol for South African oranges is a 24-day protocol with shipping options based on continuous orchard and packhouse monitoring for FCM larvae. The FMS as currently implemented by South Africa is a "set-point" type of treatment.