

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” Reverend Martin Luther King Jnr

HISTORIC CITRUS CASES AT WTO AIMED AT FAIRNESS AND SCIENTIFIC ACCURACY

Last week, the South African government took a historic step at the World Trade Organization (WTO). For the first time ever, South Africa has advanced cases in front of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to the so-called "panel stage". This means panels will have to hear the case and rule on a trade disagreement between South Africa and the European Union within a number of months.

The WTO's DSB is a relatively unknown but hugely important body that upholds the rule of law in international trade. It provides mechanisms through which disputes can be settled, and it ensures the stability necessary for global trade to function smoothly and fairly.

The issues the DSB will have to rule about concern plant health measures imposed by the EU on citrus imported from South Africa. These measures are considered by the EU to be necessary to protect it from two citrus plant health threats: Citrus Black Spot (CBS) and False Codling Moth (FCM).

South Africa already had a world-class and robust plant health system that ensures only safe, quality fruit is exported. Although measures were introduced on CBS as early as 1992, the additional CBS and FCM measures are recent developments. South Africa now has to comply with these unnecessary regulations, which include additional inspections, more intense spray programmes, excessive cold treatment protocols, numerous sampling and assessment procedures, and various other forms of costly administration. Complying with these measures places an immense burden on local citrus growers. They have to spend almost R4 billion annually just to adhere to these measures. There are citrus producing areas in South Africa that are CBS free and CBS has never spread to those areas in South Africa, but the EU is progressively putting stricter measures in place because of a perceived risk of CBS spreading to the EU.

PACKED AND SHIPPED

Over the years the variety focus groups have got better and better at their crop estimates, and have developed pride in this accuracy. This season has left many scratching their heads as to what has led to the change from the original estimate to the present prediction. One big factor has been the price for juicing fruit – from the beginning of the season the demand from processing plants for all sectors but lemons has meant that marginal fruit was diverted to these plants. In fact, the price has increased to such an extent that in many cases it makes sense to send even export quality fruit for processing. Coupled with this there has been a marked decrease in fruit size – this impacts on how many cartons the fruit will fill.

Many believe that the impact of El Nino was actually greater than had been anticipated, heat waves and lack of rain at critical times meant less fruit development, while some regions had strong winds during blossom impacting the crop. This means that the usual situation where less fruit means bigger fruit was not the case in 2024.

As the industry enters the second half of the season, variety focus group members will be keeping a keen eye on fruit size to determine whether further reductions in the crop predictions are necessary, or not. Western Cape growers have been dealt another big challenge with excessive rain during this past week, some say even bigger than the 2023 floods. This will impact packing over the next couple of weeks.

End of Week 27 Million 15 Kg Cartons	Packed	Packed	Packed	Shipped	Shipped	Original Estimate	Latest Prediction	Final Packed	Vision
SOURCE: PPECB/AGRIHUB	2022	2023	2024	2023	2024	2024	2024	2023	2024
Grapefruit	14.9 m	11.6 m	12.3 m	10.4 m	10.7 m	16.8 m	14.5 m	14.7 m	16.2 m
Mandarins	17.3 m	20.4 m	20 m	15.9 m	15.3 m	43 m	42.7 m	38 m	39.6 m
Lemons	26 m	28.8 m	26.3 m	24.6 m	21.5 m	37.9 m	35.1 m	35.6 m	39 m
Navels	18 m	15.6 m	14.2 m	11.1 m	10.6 m	25.7 m	21.6 m	24.8 m	22.3 m
Valencia	7 m	9.1 m	7.4 m	5.1 m	3.6 m	58.3 m	54.3 m	52 m	55.4 m
Total	83.2 m	85.5 m	80.2 m	67.1 m	61.7 m	181.7m	168.2 m	165.1 m	172.5 m