

As the South African citrus industry gears up for the 2016 export deal, a portion of growers have made a sacrifice for the sector's greater good with a vow to stay out of the European market this season.

Over the past three years the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) and other agencies have worked with European authorities to reduce interceptions of citrus black spot (CBS) - a key issue of concern for the Spanish, Italian and other Mediterranean citrus industries.

As a result, interceptions of the disease fell from 35 in 2013 to 15 last year, when the CGA decided to [withdraw organic lemon exports midway through the season](#) in a bid to keep numbers down.

Now the growers have taken it upon themselves to make the same choice ahead of the campaign.

"Following internal analysis, studies and reflection on the 2015 interceptions on organic citrus, the responsible group of organic citrus growers of SA [in the non CBS free areas] has after consultation with the CGA, voluntarily decided to suspend exports of organic lemons to the EU for the 2016 season," the CGA's special envoy for market access and EU matters, Deon Joubert, said in a statement.

"This will 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.

"This will have huge financial consequences on these growers but are a sign of their resolve for the long term welfare of the citrus industry in SA."

Business Day estimated the measure would cost growers around ZAR50 million (US\$3.4 million).

In the statement, Joubert said the decision was supported by all stakeholders in South Africa and applauded for its long-term sustainability drive.

"SA 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," he said.

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