José Antonio García, director of AILIMPO:

"Black Spot issue solved when South Africa closes campaign without detections"

Last week, the European Commission surprised the Spanish citrus sector with the publication of the latest update of the phytosanitary control regulations regarding Black Spot on citrus imports from South Africa, which will come into force this summer.

The new regulation will allow the entry of citrus infected with Black Spot into the EU if they are intended for processing. Moreover, the Commission has proposed to abandon its decision to strengthen controls whenever six or more detections are recorded in the same year. On a positive note, it is also worth noting the enforcement of safeguard measures for Uruguay, although these will become effective from January 2017, after 70 cases of the disease were detected in 2015. Citrus fruits from Brazil are also included in the regulation.

These measures were approved despite the fact that Spain, as a Member State, voted against them. "It represents a setback in the level of phytosanitary control established with South Africa. We are disillusioned and disappointed with these measures," stated Jose Antonio García, General Director of AILIMPO.

"We know that South Africa is making efforts to mitigate this problem, but we fear that the laxer controls will lead to a higher number of detections and therefore increase the risk of the disease spreading into Europe," added the representative of AILIMPO.

"Unfortunately, an incomprehensible decision has been made to meet the best interests of the UK and not of European growers, allowing South Africa to export citrus intended for processing with hardly any controls against Black Spot, something that Spain has been strongly rejecting, as even if they are intended for processing, some may end up being sold fresh."

Regarding the decision made by South Africa by the end of its citrus campaign, as in the previous season, José Antonio García considers it rather "a marketing action," just like the self-prohibition imposed this year forbidding the export of organic lemons from areas not declared free of the disease. "Under current European regulations, all plantations with fruit intended for export should be subject to pre-harvest and post-harvest treatments, something impossible to apply to organic products," he says.

Moreover, the South African citrus sector will stick to its decision not to export citrus to Spanish ports. "We should remind South Africa that the European legislation applies to all countries in the European Union, including Spain. If they do not want to come to Spain directly, it means they are not certain," he points out.

"South Africa has to prove its capacity to control this endemic problem, and the only way to prove this will be by closing a campaign completely free of detections, since the risk is the same with one detection or with fifteen. We'll see how this next campaign develops," he concluded.

Publication date: 4/21/2016