Deon Joubert - CGA

Growers need to remain vigilant against FCM

South African citrus growers are having a tough season so far; navel volumes are down 50% due to the unusual splitting phenomenon caused by hot and dry conditions. Valencias in the Eastern Cape were hit by storm strength winds last month reducing volumes by 500,000 cartons and the international lemon market has been described as a challenge, to say the least.

But on top of these conditions there is always the threat of Citrus Black Spot lurking in the background and added to that this year South African citrus exporters are having to work hard on measures to reduce cases of False Codling Moth.

"We knew the growing conditions for citrus in 2017 were much more challenging than in 2016. This implied that all our stakeholders would need to be vigilant in managing the EU crop this year to keep interceptions of both FCM and CBS in check," explains Deon Joubert, Special CGA Envoy for market accesss and EU matters. "The Europhyt report for end May 2017 still reflected SA with zero citrus FCM and CBS non-conformance records, which were great, but that has unfortunately changed with the end June 2017 report stating 5 FCM interceptions in Foss – France on SA Citrus."

He said this is highly disappointing, especially considering the meticulous CGA measures and protocols for 2017, issued through the Commodity Focus Groups. In the large majority of the FCM interception cases, these protocols were not followed.

Although very positive about the zero CBS interceptions Deon said it is important to remember that the traditional higher CBS risk period is still laying ahead during August to October.

There were a couple of warnings and scares on FCM during the early EU season but in most cases it has been wrongful identification or the FCM larvae was dead on inspection, which implies the measures were indeed successful. This boded well for the rigorous FCM measures most growers, exporters, DAFF and PPECB introduced, adhered to and kept implementing.

"Unfortunately now that we have the 5 confirmed FCM interceptions in France, analysing these interceptions are critical to close the loop on possible gaps in our measures and protocols. The CGA has set up a task team with the assistance of CRI, who will analyse all FCM interception cases in the EU with DAFF's able assistance. We need to learn as much about our vector pattern, possible mistakes and successes, while applying all the already known FCM measures but testing some experimental ones, during the 2017 season. This to build a reputable FCM risk management system this year for submission through DAFF to the EU Commission before year end."

FCM is not a notifiable EU pest/vector at the moment but will become one in 2018.

Deon said that the current FCM strikes are concerning and he requests growers to diligently follow the set measures for the remainder of the season.

"This will afford us some last minute analysing and the possible sensible elimination of risk factors, while working through the reporting of non-compliances/strikes."

He concludes with a reminder that the Spanish insistence was mandatory Cold Treatment on all SA citrus going to the EU. "That cost and logistical requirements would imply a total disaster for the SA Citrus Industry. This treatment remains on the horizon should we fail on the current process."

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