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Press Release

As the new import season for citrus fruit from South Africa begins, COPA and COGECA sent a letter to EU Health and Food Safety Commissioner calling for measures to be stepped up to prevent spread of black spot disease in Europe.

COPA and COGECA sent a letter today to the European Commission stressing that recommendations made by the European Food Safety Authority EFSA warn that the Commission should not underestimate the high risk of black spot disease in citrus fruit spreading and contaminating European groves via imports from South Africa.

Copa-Cogeca Secretary-General Pekka Pesonen said “Black Spot is a disease that is not present in Europe and its presence could have disastrous consequences on the citrus sector in producer countries. The EU citrus fruit sector is crucial both from an economic and social point of view. It provides the EU with high quality produce, at the same time as ensuring employment for millions of people in EU rural areas, both upstream and downstream, especially in southern countries. We cannot take the risk of importing the disease. The impact would be catastrophic for EU citrus fruit producers, particularly as southern countries are already being badly hit by the severe economic crisis”.

He underlined: “The new import season for South African citrus fruit is now beginning. Given the South African sector’s attitude and the experience gained in 2013 and 2014 when 35 and 28 interceptions respectively were recorded, the EU should take new measures and enforce its Implementing Decision from 2nd July 2014, to establish: greater phytosanitary controls at ports of entry and especially where the main imports come into the EU - the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. An article should be set up in EU law to enable the EU to decide automatically to shut its border on a precautionary basis to imports when there is a high risk. . This is a European phytosanitary problem, which requires a strong protection strategy that is coordinated from Brussels”.

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