The CGC affirms that the EU-Mercosur agreement leaves citrus fruits unprotected

In the last dates two community decisions have been consummated which, in the opinion of the CGC, could have a "great impact" on Spanish agriculture. On the one hand, on the 28th the agreement with Mercosur was confirmed for a new treaty that will favor the massive and cheap imports of Brazilian orange juice, in addition to facilitating fresh citrus fruits in counter-season of its member countries (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, which are less relevant but with potential for growth and possibilities to overlap with national production). On the other hand, the EC proposal has been known for the list of priority pests of the new regulation on plant health, which excludes the 'black spot' (Citrus Black Spot, CBS). The so-called Phyllosticta citricarpa has been discarded at the last minute, because in the analyzes of the panel of the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) it did appear, and shortly after it was known, as a result of rejections in citrus fruits imported from Tunisia, that the aforementioned fungus could be present in this country, which aggravates the threat to Spanish fields.

"It seems that Brussels has returned to close another agreement with total opacity, without making reports of previous impact for the affected economic actors and using agriculture as currency," laments the president of the association of private citrus exporters, Manuel Arrufat. Indeed**, the CGC has for years been demanding from the EU without success the documentation on the progress of the negotiation and warning of the serious consequences that on the citriculture** would have an opening as agreed in favor of the Brazilian orange juice, whose tariffs - in the absence of know the text - they could disappear. Not in vain, Brazil is after China the second largest producer of citrus, with large plantations adapted for processing into juices, which are exported by 95%, with the EU already its first destination. Only three large firms monopolize this business and the disappearance of trade barriers could pave the way for these giants either to eliminate their competition in the EU, or to control it by acquiring new packaging machines, as indeed they have already begun to do. "The EU may have managed to get Brazil to follow the Paris Agreement against climate change but should consider the reports that warn of the great environmental impact and terrible working conditions with which these multinationals work," arrufat remarks.

The Spanish industry has great strategic value. Its role, at the time of decongesting the market in fresh and to valorize the second qualities (small calibres, skin defects ...), is key: in campaigns with crops of between 6.5 and 7.5 million tons absorbs volumes of the 17/20% of the harvest; in the shortest, close to six million, it also processes 13/14%. The threat of the cheapest Brazilian offer also affects the direct juice in which Spain has specialized, of higher quality and added value than the concentrate (which is transported to the EU frozen in huge vessels and then add water) and which, contrary to that, it has neither sugar, nor water, nor added preservatives and to which only a flash pasteurization and cold storage treatment is applied. Brazil, in fact, has been producing them for years (to a lesser extent) and its logistics costs to place it in Rot-terdam (the Netherlands) are

identical to the Spaniards to reach Central Europe, but with lower prices.

On the other hand, recently it was also known that the EC has limited to 19 the list of pests that will deserve the condition of priority and that of it has eliminated the mention to the aforementioned CBS. For this concept, Brussels understands those diseases with the most serious repercussions on the economy, the environment and society. Quarantine pests that will be subject to stricter surveillance measures, action plans for their eradication, contingency and that, for all this, will have greater co-financing from the EU.
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In the allegations that the CGC has already presented, the capricious criterion followed is regretted, based on not considering the high quality losses that this fungus causes (serious skin spots) as production losses. For a sector focused on the fresh market like Spain, however, "the loss of quality by CBS should be equated to the production because the damage to the fruit means that these fruits can not be marketed," the document submitted by the CGC. The exclusion for this reason, paradoxically, does not apply to two other pests listed in the proposal as priorities in which they are compared - unlike the black spot - loss of production and quality: Cocotrachelus nenuphar and Anthonomus eugenii.

The funds for the greater vigilance of the CBS are determinant because, in fact and contrary to what the countries where the plague was holding