

Europe has suspended all imports of Argentine citrus until May 2021 following numerous detections of citrus black spot over recent months.

The decision, which was taken unilaterally and came into effect on Sunday, applies to oranges, mandarins, lemons and grapefruit until April 31 next year.

The European Commission justified the move by saying that it needed to protect the region's growers from the fungus.

There were five detections of CBS in orange shipments originating from Jujuy in northern Argentina in recent weeks, the EC said.

In July, Argentina suspended lemon exports to Europe due to a high number of CBS detections in the market, putting an early end to the season for the overall category.

But while the lemon season had at that point been winding down, the European suspension on imports of all Argentina citrus comes at the height of its export season.

The Argentine Government has sought to negotiate with the European Commission, with around 50% of the exportable citrus crop still left to be harvested.

According to Argentine newspaper La Nación, Argentine growers blame the Spanish citrus industry for pushing for the suspension. They also expect the move to result in losses in the orange sector of at least US\$40m.

Industry body Fedecitrus said: "The immediate damage to the national citrus industry is difficult to measure, given that it's not just US\$40m of orange exports that will be affected, in addition to the effects of our early suspension of lemon exports.

"But over the medium-term, the damage is greater as the entry of citrus is blocked until May 2021 and the main overseas market for Argentine citrus is the European Union."

Referring to Spain, the group said: "The attitude of the citrus growers' and exporters' associations and the Spanish Government is very clear, and they have created an unusual and arbitrary aggressiveness in Spanish ports, particularly Cartagena, which was until last year the main destination of our citrus. "