

A French ban on the sales of fruits and vegetables with identifying stickers threatens exports of U.S. sweet potatoes (approx. \$20 million in sales annually) and grapefruits (\$8 million annually), according to a USDA report.

The ban on stickers is scheduled to be implemented on January 1, 2022.

Most U.S. grapefruits and some sweet potatoes shipped overseas bear stickers for traceability and marketing purposes. French fruits and vegetables producers and importers will also face a ban on plastic packaging.

In February 2020, the French parliament passed the anti-waste law for a circular economy. The aim of the legislators was to change France's production and consumption model in order to limit waste and preserve natural resources, biodiversity and protect against climate change.

The bill aims to: eliminate disposable plastic; provide consumers better information; reduce waste and increase recycling; prohibit companies from developing products that have an embedded expiry date, known as planned obsolescence; and improve production methods.

The bill addresses many non-agricultural issues; however, two articles specifically target the fruit and vegetable sector. Article 77 prohibits plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables when their weight is below 1.5 kilograms (3.3 lbs).

It also allows for exceptions for fruit and vegetables that cannot be packaged in non-plastic packaging. Article 80 prohibits non-compostable stickers on fruits and vegetables sold in France with implementation as soon as January 1, 2022.

The ban on plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables was added during the parliamentary discussion of the bill.

According to several sources, it was a trade-off for removing a similar ban on plastic packaging for dairy products after large French dairy companies lobbied against such a prohibition, the report said.

Because of the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic, the bill and those two articles remained unnoticed by most of the French fruit and vegetable sector until later in 2020.