

South African Fruit Industry is losing millions because of Thai ban on the exportation of South African fresh produce

On Friday, 18 February 2011, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) facilitated a meeting at its Head Quarters at the OR Tambo Building in Pretoria of various stakeholders to discuss the ban imposed in 2008 by Thailand on the exportation of fresh produce from South Africa.

Present at the meeting were representatives of the following interested parties: DIRCO, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the South African Pome, Stone and Table Grape Industries, the Bureau for Food and Agriculture Policy, Government Lawyers dealing with trade matters as well as Trade Law Chambers, the trade law firm assisting industry in this matter. Also present at the meeting was the South African Ambassador to Thailand, Mr Douglas Gibson.

The meeting brought together government and the business sector with the objective of discussing and exploring all possible avenues to resolve the ban imposed by Thailand in 2008. According to a recent study by the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy in the Western Cape, this ban on the exportation of South African fresh produce to Thailand has had a devastating effect on the Fruit Industry in South Africa, with export losses estimated at R150 million per year. This has led to job losses in the industry and concomitant socio-economic problems in the communities serving the fruit industry.

Ambassador Gibson indicated that the South African Embassy in Bangkok has had continuous discussions with a wide range of decision makers in Thailand in an attempt to achieve a breakthrough. He felt that the meeting in Pretoria would give fresh impetus to the resolution of the issue.

It also emerged at the meeting that, in fact, South African products face barriers to entry in many markets where opportunities for South African exports exist.

“Government will work with South African Business as well as our trading partners, including Thailand, to consider all options to find a solution to the challenges faced by our exporters in various markets, including markets in Asia”, said Ambassador Francis Moloi, Chief Director: South Asia, South East Asia and Oceania from the DIRCO.

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