

Posted on Thu, Jul. 06, 2006

## AGRICULTURE

# Florida grapefruits are still exportable

By Susan Salisbury

Palm Beach Post

Californians won't be able to purchase Indian River grapefruit in their supermarkets this coming season, but consumers in Florida's biggest fresh citrus markets -- including Japan, Belgium, the Netherlands and France -- will be slicing the fruit as usual.

Officials with the European Union said Wednesday they have no plans to ban Florida citrus shipments and will continue, as they have for the past few years, to accept fruit from groves certified free of citrus canker.

"We're not planning any ban. We have had a policy in place for many years. That has not changed," said Wolf Maier, a counselor for Food Safety Health and Consumer Affairs with the EU Delegation of the European Commission to the United States in Washington.

Maier said the system has built-in safeguards, such as inspections and certification, that ensure the fruit shipped is disease-free.

"We have had a long relationship of trust with Florida," Maier said. "We have no reason to doubt the guarantees provided."

The EU's stance differs from that of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which said June 6 that Florida citrus growers will not be allowed to ship fruit during the 2006-07 season to six states and five territories where citrus is grown.

The ban came after input from California citrus industry officials who said they had concerns about whether canker could be spread by fruit that has no symptoms.

"The EU is our second-most important market after Japan," said Doug Bournique, executive director of the Indian River Citrus League in Vero Beach. "We have a lot of European people who have invested in [Indian River] fruit. It is vitally important for growers to have this market."