

South African floods disrupt citrus operations in Limpopo and Mpumalanga

Flooding linked to heavy and prolonged rainfall is disrupting agricultural activity in parts of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, with citrus growers among those most affected. Strong river currents are moving toward the sea, isolating communities and damaging infrastructure across several districts.

According to Agri Limpopo CEO Deidre Carter, cooperation between provincial disaster management structures, police, and the air force has played a key role in rescue operations and in limiting loss of life. She said the scale of the event requires continued coordination as conditions remain unstable.

Several citrus-growing areas are affected, including Maruleng, Ba-Phalaborwa, Greater Tzaneen, Greater Letaba, Collins Chabane, and Greater Giyani, as well as parts of Mpumalanga such as Nkomazi, Mbombela, and Bushbuckridge. Flooding has also impacted transport routes in and around the Kruger National Park.

Rainfall totals have exceeded historic norms in some locations. Carter said Phalaborwa received more than 700 mm of rain since 9 January, while Tzaneen and Letsitele recorded just under 400 mm during the past week. "In many areas, the floods are already exceeding the 100-year flood line, and small rivulets changed into rivers spanning 50m in the blink of an eye."

Citrus production is under pressure as the harvest period approaches. Carter said harvesting is currently not possible in many orchards due to waterlogging. She added that damage to roads and supporting infrastructure is limiting access to farms and packhouse routes.

Similar conditions are reported in Mpumalanga. Agri Mpumalanga executive manager Robert Davel said saturated soils are increasing the risk of further damage to roads and electricity infrastructure. Naomi Excell, CEO of Agri Letaba, said harvest preparations have been set back, with farm roads in some areas damaged to the extent that workers cannot reach orchards.

Operational challenges are also affecting crop protection. Pieter Vorster, director of Mahela Group, said citrus growers are unable to spray against citrus black spot as machinery cannot enter waterlogged orchards. He added that irrigation dam walls are under pressure due to saturated soils.

Carter urged farmers to report dams at risk of failure. "Dams that collapse present additional risk in areas already flooded. If we know of these possibilities ahead of time, we will be able to evacuate people and animals at risk."

Despite on-farm disruptions, growers in both provinces are assisting nearby communities with evacuations and road access where possible. The South African Weather Service's Red Level 10 warning for disruptive rainfall remains in effect over parts of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, with further rainfall forecast over the coming 24 to 48 hours.

Source: Farmer's Weekly (<https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/efforts-underway-to-assist-flood-victims-in-limpopo-and-mpumalanga/>)

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Publication date: Mon 19 Jan 2026

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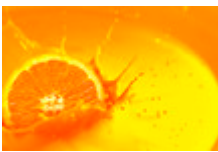
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