

Christine Dempsey & Louwrens Bezuidenhout – RCL Trekkerdienste | New Holland

Corporate generosity extended to a sombre Gamtoos community



© Christine Dempsey The mood is sombre in the Gamtoos Valley. A once-in-a-century deluge swept away entire orchards on Thursday, 7 May. "It's a piece of your farm that's literally just gone," explains Christine Dempsey of agricultural equipment dealer RLC Trekkerdienste in Patensie, the valley's main town. "It happened so incredibly fast. We're lucky that the flood waters came through on Thursday morning. We're really grateful it didn't happen at night. There would've been loss of life, for sure."

Right: rows of dislodged citrus trees

Some orchards were covered in silt and soil up to the canopy. Some might still survive, and it is imperative that they be excavated as soon as possible. In some low-lying orchards, pumps are still running day and night to remove water.

The flood could not have come at a worse time, Dempsey remarks: right in the citrus harvest.

Residents therefore felt considerable anxiety at predictions of further rainfall last

week, but the precipitation fortuitously missed where it was predicted to fall – directly over their catchment area. Still, it was a lot of additional water, on saturated ground. "Last week's flood was, in normal terms, a big flood, but luckily nothing compared to the previous one," says Louwrens Bezuidenhout, her colleague at RCL Trekkerdienste, sole New Holland dealer in the region. He also grows citrus, and himself lost 20 hectares of good land from his farm, forever deposited elsewhere.

Six weeks on, some communities still cut off from outside world

Bezuidenhout shared photos of what he was seeing around him with the New Holland's South African area managers who immediately wanted to know how they could help, he recounts. Fixing the roads, especially low water bridges, is the first order of business, and to that end New Holland Construction made available a brand-new backhoe loader (TLB) for 600 hours – roughly the equivalent of six months – to scoop up the road matrix necessary to rebuild roads, low water bridges especially.

Similarly, New Holland Agriculture has made a tractor available, and it will pull a bespoke 10 tonne tipping trailer, constructed by Van Zyl Staalwerke in Reitz (Free State Province), and with this equipment road-fixing will commence.



© PotentieelA brand-new backhoe loader and tractor, with bespoke trailer, made available by New Holland and Van Zyl Staalwerke pro bono for the reconstruction of the roads and infrastructure after the recent catastrophic flood

Some farming communities are still cut off, six weeks since the Grootrivier from the Karoo and the Kouga River joined up after a thousand millimetres dropped over three days, the Cambria valley, home to the eponymous premium navel type, among them.

They knew heavy rain was coming, Bezuidenhout remembers, but they thought the Kouga Dam at 32% would take several days to fill up, as it usually does. Instead, overnight it was full to the point of overflowing to a point where the water flow could not be measured anymore.

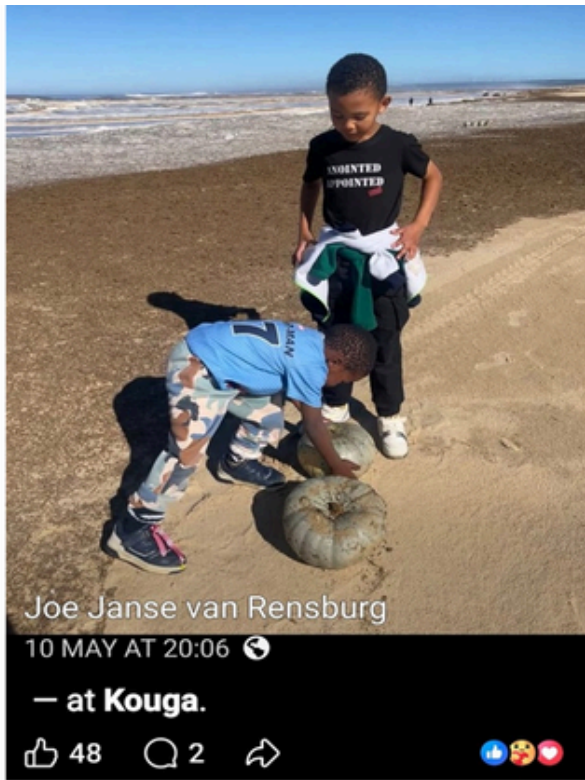
Where it all surged out, at the mouth of the Gamtoos River emptying into the Indian Ocean, pumpkins and corn cobs were strewn on the beach. Someone's whole maize crop, only days away from the harvester.



© Christine Dempsey *Citrus tree washed up on the beach at the mouth of the Gamtoos River*

Gamtoos Water, the local irrigation board responsible for running the Kouga Dam and the canal system fed by the dam, is really close to its community. Its corps of fighting fit technical personnel will employ this equipment to fill up roads, to clear out canals that were filled up by rockfall and debris, and to give help to farmers who ask for assistance. "Gamtoos Water knows exactly where the problems are," says Bezuidenhout, "and they've got the operators."

Waterlogged orchards have dropped fruit – perhaps late Midnight varieties will be less affected than mandarins and navels – but the main concern is the quality of the crop emerging from this event that will be forever remembered in this part of the world.



© Judy Schellingerhout; Joe Janse van Rensburg

Maize (corn) and vegetables found on the beach after the flood



© Johan van der Watt

At the height of the deluge, 7 May 2026



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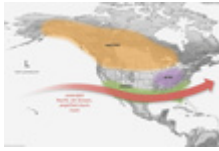
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