

Steve Oosthuizen – Cape Fruit Coolers:

“This season is a thriller; no one is spared”

"We ought to be twice as busy as we are," says Steve Oosthuizen of Cape Fruit Coolers with cold facilities situated outside Cape Town. "This time of the year, we're usually very busy with citrus and avocados, apples and pears. But we're waiting for citrus to pick up, and these storms have delayed and impacted it even more..."

The whole year has been marked by lower fruit volumes than usual through the Cape Town port, Oosthuizen says, initially because of the tremendous wind in the bay and widespread diversions of grapes and stonefruit to other ports, and now as a result of a delayed citrus crop caused by this week's severe rain event and inaccessible orchards. He is waiting for clients to receive updated forecasts of their citrus crops for the next few weeks to plan their next move.



© Cape Fruit Coolers *Lower fruit volumes have moved through Cape Town's fruit facilities thus far this year*

Wind damage to reduce exports

"Ceres is a disaster zone," Oosthuizen says. The town had over 450mm rainfall over the course of a day. It is still cut off through a rockfall in a mountain pass and still without electricity – it might be weeks before electricity is restored, and in the meantime, CA rooms are run by generators and by solar power stores in extensive battery banks.

"The real damage from this week has been the damage done by the wind - speeds of 80km/h, 100 km/h blew through the orchards," he remarks. Districts that had hitherto been spared misfortune (like the severe hail in Ceres apple orchards in January) such as Grabouw have been keenly affected by the storm – to what extent, they don't know for sure, but it will be "massive", he reckons.

"This season is a thriller. It has a serious impact on our business: our business model rests on putting through volumes of fruit. You can make all kinds of alternative plans, but without volumes, your hands are tied. And it's the same for all of the Cape's cold rooms: we're all bleeding together. Everyone in the fruit industry is impacted this year. It's a very challenging year for the farmers and us all in the fruit industry."



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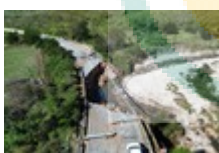
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