
Pressure grows in Cape fruit regions

Growers fear the long-term impact if the Western Cape region of South Africa does not receive sufficient rainfall

Water storage levels in the Western Cape region of South Africa are still critically low, stoking concerns over the future of fruit production.

Although all the fruit for this year's harvest, except late citrus, has been harvested, the lack of rain is posing huge problems and raising questions about what would happen if sufficient rain does not fall over the next three months.

The Cape is a winter rainfall region but after three years of low rainfall, this week the main storage dams - which feed both the agri and sprawling urban areas around Cape Town - are only 23 per cent full. That compares to 35 per cent last year.

The City of Cape Town further escalated its water restrictions this week, advising citizens to only use water for cooking and drinking.

The fruit regions are not all affected in the same way, with Ceres and the Hex River Valley still reportedly having enough water. However, due to the rains arriving late, irrigation had to continue longer after the harvest this year. In the Berg River region around Paarl and Franschhoek, and further down to Piketberg, there is real concern about the next crops.

This is one of South Africa's oldest grape growing regions and a big part of the economy. In the Citrusdal Valley growers are now moving into their late season.

The Navel crop ran short and there is still concern about the Valencias. The late mandarin crop is reported to be good, ironically with the dry, almost desert-like heat conditions resulting in fruit of exceptional eating quality. The Olifants River around Citrusdal also has a growing table grape production and their growers fear major problems if they do not get rain.

Growers believe that if there is not above average rainfall between now and the end of winter, things could go horribly wrong.