

Powerful lowveld hailstorm causes long-lasting damage

By Annelie Coleman May 31, 2018 9:00 am

The effects of a violent hailstorm in the Lowveld on 27 May will be felt by fruit and macadamia farmers for a long time to come, according to Barend van Rensburg, Agri Mpumalanga representative in the Nelspruit area.



A citrus orchard damaged by a severe hailstorm.
Photo: Barend van Rensburg

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Vast areas of citrus orchards in the Komatipoort and Malelane districts were wiped out by the thunderstorm, which produced hailstones as large as golf balls, Van Rensburg said.

He said that some farmers had lost their entire crop of oranges due to be harvested over the next three months.

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The trees had suffered such as serious damage that it would take them up to three years to be fully productive again.

The icy deluge had also destroyed vegetables on the brink of being harvested. There was some respite for **macadamia** farmers: although the trees had been damaged by the hailstones, the nuts that had fallen were left relatively unscathed because of their strong shells.

Giep Joubert, **sugar cane** and banana producer on Marhula Estates, lost 80ha of cane to the hail. He said that he nonetheless had reason to be thankful.

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"Although we suffered serious damage to the sugar cane, our banana plantations were, by the Grace of God, not affected at all. In my 30 years on the farm, I've never witnessed a storm like

this," he said.

Van Rensburg said there had also been reports of livestock and game succumbing to the hail.

"We should also keep in mind the destruction of infrastructure such as irrigation structures, houses and vehicles. This storm caused millions of rands in damage," he said.

