

South Africa

Drought crisis intensifies in Northern and Eastern Cape

The continuing drought in the Northern and Eastern Cape is escalating into a humanitarian crisis. The western part of the Eastern Cape and adjacent parts of the Northern Cape have been suffering from drought for at least the past seven years. According to Doug Stern, Agri Eastern Cape president, growers are despairing as their financial reserves are depleted and flocks cut to the bare minimum, with countless farms being put up as collateral for bank loans.

At his point in time, the water level of the Kouga Dam stands at 4%, the lowest since the dam was built in the late 1960s. This posed a serious threat to citrus production in the Gamtoos Valley, according to Stern. While an excellent citrus crop was being harvested at the moment, producers were extremely concerned about the production season starting in August. Without sufficient irrigation, production would be severely compromised, trees could be lost and hundreds of job opportunities put on the line.

Stern told [farmersweekly.co.za](https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/drought-crisis-deepens-in-northern-and-eastern-cape/) (<https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/drought-crisis-deepens-in-northern-and-eastern-cape/>) that drought-stricken farmers have been caught in a perfect storm: “[Farmers’] cash flow was eroded long ago and they try their best to survive from day to day. Many can’t afford to keep their children in school and have reverted to homeschooling. Many of them struggle to afford basic daily necessities and large numbers of workers have had to be laid off.”

Sybil Visagie, convenor of the Save the Sheep drought relief organisation, described a similar situation in the drought-stricken areas of Boesmanland, Namaqualand and Karoo regions of the Northern Cape. She said the effects of the drought were far-reaching.

Photo source: *Dreamstime.com*

Publication date: Tue 4 May 2021

