

Lemon exports affected by continuing strike Kirkwood packhouses stand empty while citrus producers remain in talks with community

Two weeks and two days into the violent strike in the Eastern Cape's Sundays River Valley, and orchards and packhouses are still deserted, although there is an expectation that a resumption might be possible on Monday.

Apart from the incidents of arson that accompanied the start of the strike, FreshPlaza was also told of acts of sabotage (ripping out citrus trees, intentionally flooding orchards) by, it is alleged, a small number of vigilantes some of whom, it is claimed, have come from elsewhere to incite violence during the strike and keep workers from returning to work.



The citrus industry is the dominant employer in the area and remains in continuing talks with the local community.

The Sundays River Valley Citrus Producer Forum has estimated the infrastructure damage caused by the strike at R70 million (4.2 million euros), with a further R100 million (6 million euros) damage to export fruit.

Meanwhile, rain in the northern provinces has slowed the lemon harvest and as a result, the lemon season is behind its usual pace.

The Citrus Growers' Association has noted that by the end of week 16, 4.8 million 15kg cartons of lemons had been packed this year and of that, 3.5 million cartons have been shipped. Last year this time, 7.4 million cartons had been packed and 5.1 million cartons shipped.

The lemon export estimate has been very slightly downsized from 32.3 million to 32.1 million cartons

The labour unrest has not spread to the neighbouring Gamtoos Valley (Hankey and Patensie) and some Sundays River producers have trucked their fruit to Patensie packhouses.



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