



Local government "deeply concerned" at flood warning

Western Cape citrus harvested "day and night" ahead of predicted winter storm

In Citrusdal, in the Olifants River Valley of the Western Cape, picking and packing teams have been working day and night over the past two weeks, with the prediction of next week's 60 to 80mm of rainfall in the Cape's mountains, accompanied by storm winds of up to 70 to 80km/h, spurring them on.

A packhouse manager, who's running lemons and navels over the line at the moment, says that the Citrusdal area is predicted to get almost a quarter of their annual rainfall next week.



Citrus orchards in Citrusdal

The office of the provincial ministry of local government, environmental affairs and

development planning has said that the minister was "deeply concerned" by a weather advisory issued by the South African Weather Services, warning of potential flooding and damage to infrastructure in low-lying areas from Sunday evening into Wednesday next week.

Western Cape navel estimate reduced

"We have been hurrying to get the bulk of the fruit off the trees. We expect that the quality will drastically decrease after the rain," the packhouse manager says, noting that skin cracking has been problematic this year.

The Western Cape's navel estimate has been reduced by 500,000 cartons (from an original estimate of 7.67 million 15kg cartons to 7.17 million cartons) as a result of cracks in the rind, occurring mostly on fruit on the under- and inside of the canopy.

For this reason, instead of picking a tree clean in one go, many growers have decided to focus the harvesting activities on the most crack-prone areas, and to come back later for the top fruit which takes much longer to harvest.

Winter rainfall has been late in arriving

The Western Cape's rainfall has been late to commence and next week's rain will be the start of the proper wet Cape winter.

"We're not ungrateful for the rain," a citrus grower explains. "The farmers on the other side of the mountain plant wheat - they need the rain and our dams need the rain."

The provincial government has noted that the combined level of the major dams feeding Cape Town (Wemmershoek, Voëlville, Steenbras Upper and Lower, Theewaterskloof and the Berg River Dams) are currently at 64.4%; last year this time it was 75%.

Across the province, dams are currently at 51.7%, also slightly lower than this time last year.

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Author: [Carolize Jansen](#)

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