



Justin Chadwick, Citrus Growers' Association of South Africa - Swift disaster declaration needed to help flood-stricken farmers in Western Cape

The Citrus Growers' Association of South Africa (CGA) welcomes the recent update by the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) on the estimated damage to agricultural infrastructure by floods in the province in mid-June.



The CGA trusts the National Disaster Management Centre will now act with the urgency that the situation requires and declare the floods a provincial disaster. It is crucial that funding and support are made available to the stricken farmers and

communities as soon as possible.

The CGA has written to the Western Cape minister of agriculture, Ivan Meyer, to thank him and his department for their swift response to the floods. "We have also offered any assistance, should it be needed, in securing a rapid declaration of disaster. We agree with the WCDoA that figure of R1.053 billion is "a more credible, albeit conservative estimate". The full scope of all losses are, of course, not yet known. Damage to riverbanks, irrigation equipment, private roads, vineyards and fruit orchards were extensive. Citrus growers in three district municipalities were affected by the severe rains that fell," said the CGA CEO Justin Chadwick in the statement.

Especially hard hit was the Cederberg Local Municipality, home to a large number of citrus growers. The CGA calculates that damages in the Citrusdal valley alone are R55,000 per hectare of citrus. The flood thus caused a total estimated damage of near R500 million to growers in that specific valley. Luckily, close to 60% of the early cultivars were already harvested when the worst rain hit.

Abrie van Zyl, a fourth generation citrus grower, farms on Middelpost in Citrusdal and suffered damage estimated at R10 million. "It was a very big shock. You are powerless, seeing so much of your time, effort and money just being taken away by the water in a few hours. But that is nature. You have to go on. You just mustn't run out of plans," he says. Middlepost has 50 permanent farm workers and employs another 150 people during the season.

Van Zyl says the floods have tested the community's resolve. "Our main priority was to keep things going and to get good quality fruit off the trees and into cartons. We got extra teams. We worked incredibly hard and we are proud that a majority of the valley is back up to schedule now."

Initially, the floods caused a two-week delay in the harvesting and shipping of citrus. Due to the tireless efforts of farmers and farm workers, they have now caught up with the schedule of the export season. Although, the Citrusdal area estimates close to a 20% loss of early cultivar crops. The Western Cape province exports more than 20 million cartons of citrus per season.



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