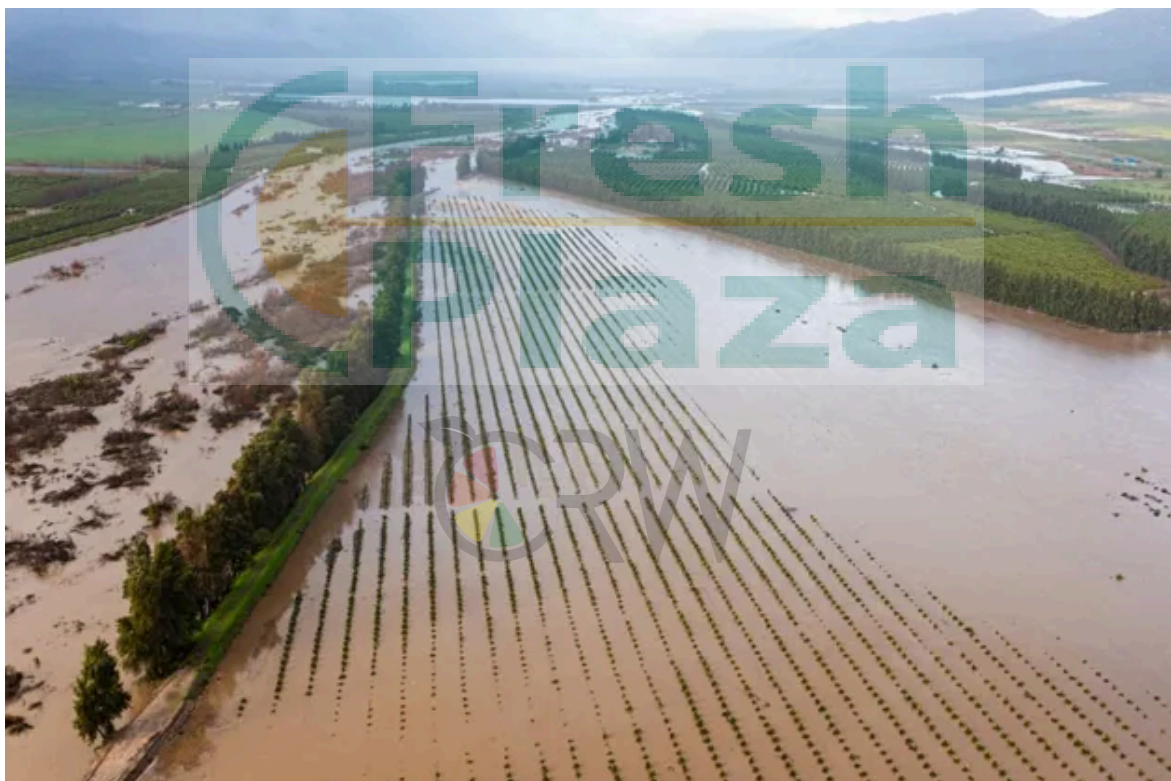


“Citrus exports from Citrusdal flowing again, but with many challenges”

Citrus exports are flowing again from Citrusdal, one of South Africa's major growing areas that was cut off due to recent floods in the Western Cape Province. Growers, exporters and pack houses in the area report that while exports are flowing, many challenges remain.



The floods came at the height of citrus export season and caused nearly two weeks of delays in harvesting and packing in July. However, the cooperation and resilience of the local community has triumphed, and citrus is now moving to the Port of Cape Town at an increased speed and disruption to citrus exports have been minimised, notes the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA).



The damage to the main road connecting to the town has not been repaired yet. Provincial government authorities assessed the damage, with the flooding in the Western Cape officially been classified as a disaster. The citrus industry hopes this will allow speedy access to funds and much needed assistance to rebuild the road infrastructure. The local citrus industry has put designs and plans forward after last year's disaster and hopes that a permanent solution can be found going forward.

The only alternative bridge now connecting the isolated valley is to the north of the town on the farm of Mouton Citrus. Here they waited over a week for flooding to also clear to allow passage over this low-water bridge. Local citrus growers are now using this bridge and a route of identified secure roads to move citrus out of the valley. "Around 20 million 15kg cartons of citrus must move from the valley to the port every season. Right now is the peak of orange harvesting, with international markets waiting for our Navels and Valencias, and we cannot keep them waiting," explained Boet Mouton, Director at Mouton Citrus. He emphasised that even though the disaster has set back the community, the disruption to exports would be temporary.

Gerrit van der Merwe, citrus farmer and Chairperson of the CGA said, "It was such a relief to get things going again. In a time of crisis, we come together. Unfortunately, this is our second flooding crisis in a year, but in a certain sense it has also prepared us to handle some of the problems we face."

Growers and exporters in the area have worked hard to clear the backlog completely. Van der Merwe remained vocal while the town was cut off, stating that the citrus farms are the lifeblood of the community. The citrus industry sustains just over 90% of the Citrusdal area economically.



"It was terrible to have the entire valley come to a standstill. There were days when nobody could work. Now everything is moving. It is amazing how people jump in and really get going. The immediate priority is catching up with production, packing and shipping, but plans were already being proposed on how the valley can secure itself against similar flood levels and extreme weather in the future. A lot can actually be done, from dredging to bank stabilisation, and also creating vegetation cover," notes van der Merwe.

A large citrus packer and exporter in Citrusdal noted: "Yes, we are packing again. But many challenges remain. The road is not fixed yet and the alternative route works. However, we have to make so many plans to get the citrus fruit out."

Citrusdal is known for its quality citrus and is 170km from the Port of Cape Town. The valley exports mostly to markets in the US as part of the summer citrus campaign and to Europe. The heavy storms conditions have lifted with the port of Cape Town running again, allowing more vessel movement, which is crucial to get the citrus fruit to markets on time.

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