

■ NATIONAL

Citrusdal farmers devastated by two years of floods

For the past two winters, farmers have not been able to grow crops due to devastating floods

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Picture: 123RF/KOSTIC DUSAN

What were once thriving vegetable gardens run by 10 small-scale farmers in Oranjeville, Citrusdal in the Cederberg, are now partly overgrown with only a few dead crops.

For the last two winters, these farmers have not been able to grow crops due to devastating floods in the region. Usually by this time of the year, the farmers have grown large cabbages, cauliflower, onions and potatoes. All of these vegetables washed away this winter, as they did a year ago.

GroundUp first visited the farmers in July 2023. They were struggling to put food on the table after the heavy rains wrecked their crops. At the time the Western Cape Department of Agriculture estimated the

total damage to agriculture and infrastructure across the province was R1bn.

Over a year later, very little has changed for many of the farmers. They told GroundUp that this year was especially difficult because their vegetable gardens were flooded for months.

Janelle Simons is a member of the Surplus People Project (SPP) and grows her vegetables on a piece of municipal land in Oranjeville with about nine other farmers. None of the farmers could salvage most of their winter crop, she says.

When we arrived the vegetable gardens were overgrown. Some dead cabbages were still lying on the ground. Part of the land had been cleared where new onion seedlings were planted. “We couldn’t come in here at all. Once you go in, you sink into the ground,” said Simons.

Citrusdal was badly hit by heavy rain during 2023 and again in 2024. In both cases the main access road was damaged and the town was cut off. In both cases, residents in formal and informal housing were either displaced or evacuated.

Another farmer, Lawrence Jonas, said that when the town was cut off again this year, food prices in shops shot up and became unaffordable to most people. He previously relied on his own crop for food, but has not been able to do this and often had to rely on getting food from others.

Despite almost losing hope, the farmers say they are determined to get back to work. They have started preparing the soil for planting for them to be able to harvest in December, said Jonas. “My heart is in farming,” said he said.

Albertus Jonas, who has been farming on the piece of land since the 1990s, told GroundUp that this was one of the worst floods he had experienced, but not the only one, and that it was part of a cycle.

“Perhaps next year will go a bit better ... There is a time it comes and a time it goes,” said Jonas.

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