

"Rain damage in Citrusdal would not be as severe as in 2023"

The citrus industry in Citrusdal in the Western Cape Province near Cape Town is relieved that the heavy rains of this week were not as impactful and damaging as last year. "The rains affected the packing of Clementine's, navels and soft citrus due to some pack houses that halted production to ensure the safety of employee transport. The rains affected our day-to-day operations, but getting the fruit away quickly as well as making plans to ensure people's safety is key during this time," says Wayne Murray, operations manager at Goede Hoop Citrus, one of the largest pack houses in the region.



Some citrus orchards in Citrusdal and roads that were flooded.

As a precaution the main access road to the town, which was badly damaged last year, was blocked off for most of Wednesday, but fortunately open again later on Wednesday for light vehicles only. Normal operations returned late on Thursday

morning, with all types of vehicles allowed to cross the river, although with a stop and go system in place.

Their focus at Goede Hoop Citrus was to ensure the workers, many whose homes are on the opposite side of the river, were able to get back safely. "Yesterday, we decided to stop production a little earlier. Meanwhile, we utilized unaffected employees to swiftly pack away the fruit. Fortunately, Goede Hoop Citrus has three facilities on site in Citrusdal and we were able to adjust our packing schedules and stock between the facilities to still ensure all the fruit being packed, albeit a day or two later. The Olifants River is still flowing strongly, but luckily the rainfall subsided a bit and water levels has decreased to ensure that the impact is less than last year. Some of the orchards have been affected by the increase in water levels, but initial indication is that the damage would not be as severe as 2023. As low-lying orchards have experienced an increased water supply, we intend to adjust our post-harvest chemical applications to mitigate potential adverse impacts on fruit quality. We however are positive that these adjustments would translate to protecting the quality of the fruit, although this will increase packaging costs," Murray explains.



The onset of heavy rains marks the conclusion of the Goede Hoop Citrus Clementine season, while it disrupted their day-to-day operations."Here we are, dealing with the last of the Clementine's, yet we also have to receive and pack the early navel varieties, which were expected to reach their peak in week 23. These bottlenecks ripple through the entire value chain. Our goal is to swiftly process and transport the fruit to the cold stores in Cape Town, from where it must

proceed to the port. The prediction is that the cold stores will soon face increasing pressure as a result of the stockpile that has accumulated on our end, caused by restricted access routes," says Murray.



He says from here on a fine balance must be maintained to keep on supplying their customers in different markets. "One always faces the degree of fairness of how to maintain the fine balance with programs abroad that must be serviced on time. The vessels also does not wait if there is storm in Citrusdal. Those customers eagerly anticipate fruit during specific weeks, and failure to deliver it out of our town on time could result in lost marketing opportunities."

Following a period of low demand for navels in Europe, there seems to be an increase in demand over the past week. "The demand for the Western Cape Navels has started to pick up consistently, as we are a black spot free area. Our marketing manager is currently in Europe monitoring our arrivals and meeting with our clients to ensure the correct amount of fruit of the right quality is exported as the market requires. His feedback also indicates an increase in demand, although there is still a slight concern with regard to the current market selling prices of the Egyptian Valencia's," states Murray.



Goede Hoop Citrus has one large site with three large packing house facilities. From here, they pack and export the citrus to Europe and other key markets. "Given the present circumstances, we're in a more favourable position compared to last year. The main road remains under regulation, open during the day, and closed at night. The decision hinges on the water levels, with authorities actively monitoring them to determine closures. Regrettably, some orchards have suffered water damage. This particular area had only recently recovered from last year's flood, and our hearts go out to the affected farmers," Murray concludes.

For more information:

Wayne Murray

Goede Hoop Citrus

Tel: +27 72 145 0589

wayne@ghcitrus.com

Publication date: Fri 7 Jun 2024

Author: Clayton Swart

© FreshPlaza.com

•