

“We are unable to get our citrus fruit out of Citrusdal for the next few weeks.”

Flood damage, following two weeks of heavy stormy rain and cold fronts across the Western Cape Province in South Africa, has again struck the major citrus growing area of Citrusdal. The town is cut off with the main road leading into the town washed away and many citrus orchards flooded, with no fruit moving out of the town. This affects the summer citrus campaign to the U.S. market and exports to Europe.



Photos by AC Burger photography.

Commenting directly from the affected area in Citrusdal is Gerrit van der Merwe Jnr., a grower of ALG Estates and chairperson of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA), "Our town is once again cut-off. The same road that was fixed in last year's storms have flooded and is washed away at the same place. We don't know when it will be fixed. We are unable to get our citrus fruit out

for the next few weeks. We are in the middle of the citrus harvest season. We already have a weak harvest on the trees due to all the rain. Now we are in more trouble. We are in trouble because we have clients who rely on us. We don't sell fruit, we sell confidence of supply."



Van der Merwe says the private industry in the town gave financial resources for better planning to prevent this kind of flooding. "While the roads were fixed last year, better plans were unfortunately not made to prevent this from happening again. In our private capacity we determined that drenching must be done in the river that runs under the bridge. We are grateful for the R12 million we received from the Western Cape Government towards the R50 million that is needed. Due to last year's floods we as the private industry lost R500 million and the state infrastructure had a similar loss. It is very early, but the damage will likely be very big again this year. However, not only is the citrus industry affected, about 90% of the whole town relies on the citrus industry. The food supplies are running low in the town, we are heading for a humanitarian disaster," warns Van der Merwe.



Shipping operations were suspended in the Port of Cape Town for this week due to heavy and rough seas. This affects shipping rerouted via the Cape of Good Hope due to rebel attacks in the Red Sea with dangerous swells as high as 10 meter reported on this major sea route. Ships are said to be waiting out the rough seas further up the coast in and around Durban.

Charles Gant from Anlin Shipping, who make use of the private terminals in Cape Town and other South African ports, said their citrus shipments were delayed by one week. "The weather in Cape Town delayed our U.S. program with one week. Port Elizabeth is also somewhat delayed on EU/Russia shipments, but it is not too serious."



Due to the ongoing stormy weather, the electricity supply was also disrupted to several of the major export fruit growing areas in the Western Cape Province where citrus, stone fruit and table grapes are grown. Damage to bridges have been reported in the largest table grape production area of the Hex River. In Grabouw, an apple producer noted they had localised flooding on gravel farm roads. Initial reports show apple trees were spared any damage.



Meanwhile, the cold fronts, not unusual for this time of the year in the province during winter, made landfall one after the other over the past two weeks. This overwhelmed storm water and other infrastructure in the Cape Metropole, leading to flooding in many areas. It not only affected thousands of people in informal settlements with the winds damaging the roofs of houses impacting several thousand people. The City's Disaster Management Services were on full alert to assist residents. The national government provided alternative accommodation to affected communities. Everyone in the Western Cape Province are bracing themselves for more rain and ice-cold weather that is forecasted to continue daily well into next week.

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