

SA deciduous fruit industry reeling under flood disaster

The South African deciduous fruit industry, which is the largest agricultural commodity grown in the region, has been severely damaged by recent floods in key production areas, such as Elgin, Grabouw, Vyeboom and Villiersdorp (EGVV), parts of the Klein Karoo, and Franschhoek.

During crisis talks with the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA), it was estimated that the damage to producers and infrastructure in the EGVV area alone could be between R400 to R500m. This is a significant blow to the industry, which is a major contributor to the South African economy.



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The WCDoA launched a mobile phone app to connect with producers who had suffered damage. Preliminary data from 26 producers in the Grabouw region indicated that flood damage amounted to a total of R160m. This does not include Elgin, Villiersdorp and Vyeboom.

Infrastructure damage was reported on: power grids, orchards, net structures, buildings, machinery, irrigation systems and equipment, irrigation canals; as well as roads and bridges that were washed away. The wind and rain experienced last weekend caused further damage. Numerous farm roads and bridges were completely washed away.

Hortgro's executive director, Anton Rabe, says that topsoil and many orchards have been lost. "The production season in the EGVV is now starting in earnest. Spray programmes, pollination and critical inputs such as diesel, have been severely disrupted."

Repairing infrastructure

It is important to repair the roads and bridges that are essential for farmers to access their land and get their produce to market, especially for stone fruit producers who will be harvesting soon. There are also many packhouses in the EGVV region that are full of pome fruit that needs to be exported.

The repair and replacement of irrigation canals, water pipes and pumps is critical to save the production season. Electricity and cell phone reception have not yet been fully restored; further complicating logistics and attempts at assistance.

Glaudi Skog, the EGVV agriculture representative, says that the humanitarian need in the region is significant with communities needing food and drinking water. "Hortgro has already donated R250,000 to the Gift of the Givers. They will distribute food parcels and other emergency items in the respective regions".

An appeal is made to the public to make donations to Gift of the Givers to assist the people of the EGVV and other flood disaster areas.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elise-Marie Steenkamp

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