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Theft, vandalism cost citrus farmers millions

08:55 (GMT+2), Fri, Friday, April 01, 2016

By Lourens Schoeman

Citrus farmers in the Sundays River Valley are losing millions every season because of theft of fruit and vandalising of orchards, said Hannes de Waal, CEO of the Sundays River Citrus Co-operative (SRCC).

De Waal told *Farmer's Weekly* that producers have been battling with this problem for the past three years. One of the main concerns raised by producers was that police did not react when complaints of vandalism and theft were reported by the farmers.

"The vandals cause enormous damage to orchards.

Tons of fruit, mainly lemons – many of them not even ripe – are stripped off the trees, breaking and damaging the branches in the process," said De Waal.

"Blocks and blocks of orchards, in some instances whole orchards, have been damaged, causing huge losses for the producers."

According to farmers, the stolen fruit is transported from the orchards at night in trucks and bakkies and then sold to unknown consumers.

"It is of the utmost importance that producers increase protection of their properties to keep the thieves and vandals out," said Deon Joubert, chairperson of the Sundays River Agri Association.

Vicky Knoetze, DA MPL for the area said she and the party's MEC for safety and security in the Eastern Cape's provincial legislature, Bobby Stevenson, visited the area after complaints were received from a number of producers.

"One of them had suffered a loss of at least R3-million when his orchards were stripped of fruit. These cases of theft and vandalism are threatening thousands of job opportunities and should be stopped forthwith," said Knoetze.

She said she and Stevenson had discussed the complaints that police are not investigating cases of theft of fruit and vandalism with the officer in charge of the Addo police station: "He told us that all reported cases will be investigated."

"I have personal knowledge of two cases that have been opened and investigated successfully," said SAPS spokesperson Lt Gerda Swart.

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What do you think of Farmer's Weekly magazine's new layout design?

☐ It looks great! Clean, fresh and modern.

☐ I preferred the old design.

☐ Was there a redesign?

Last week's poll

Should the drought be declared a national disaster?

Yes, it should have been declared six months ago (88.69%)

No, government can't afford to (11.31%)



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