

"It will not take longer than a week and a half for us to get the citrus fruit out of Citrusdal"

Five days have passed and the large citrus growing town of Citrusdal is still cut off from the rest of the Western Cape Province in South Africa. Citrus growers and members of the community are waiting on government authorities to make emergency plans to be able to access the town to bring much needed food, medical supplies etc. They also hope the rain and flood water will subside, so that a private road with a low water bridge of a large citrus producer will become available to use later this week.



Gerrit van der Merwe Jnr., a grower of ALG Estates and chairperson of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA), based in the town of Citrusdal says the current plan is to use the private road and bridge of another large citrus producer in the area. "The plan is to use a private bridge of a large citrus

producer. The government and the relevant authorities need to come together to discuss the options as well as traffic rules etc. that will apply if the private bridge is to be used. We hope that by this Friday, or soon thereafter, we would be able to move the first fruit via this alternative route."

Van Der Merwe says the damage is still being assessed. "Citrusdal will miss a week to a week and a half. There are many challenges, but we believe it will not take longer than a week and a half for us to get the fruit out. Right now, the focus is on the short term plan to get the needed food and medicine etc. into the town. This year's floods hit us four weeks later than last year. There's a lot of infrastructure damage. Most of the early Navels are packed, while we will wait a bit later for the Mandarins and Valencia's. The impact on the fruit will be less than last year. However, this will affect our crop estimate. Our biggest priority now is to avoid a humanitarian crisis, because the available food in the town can start to run out. Because most people in this town rely on the citrus harvesting, if our industry does not start operating again soon, these people will not be able to work and will later on not be able to even afford to buy the much-needed food supplies."



The farming group with the private bridge, who did not want to be mentioned at this stage, said they are relying on the government authorities for the alternative plan. "Our low bridge is still covered with water. We are also waiting for the water to subside. The flooding is much more intense than last year. It is too early to determine the full extent of the damage to everything, from the infrastructure to the crops," the grower noted.

Agri Western Cape noted: "The flooded roads in and around Citrusdal were discussed in a disaster management meeting with all role players who thoroughly aware of the challenges. We do not have an official Rand value of the damage yet; we are currently busy with a survey along with the Western Cape Department of Agriculture to determine the damage. Unfortunately, producers cannot avoid further damage due to the rivers that are flowing so strongly, we call on growers to do everything to ensure the safety of people."

The Port of Cape Town has been reopened over the weekend after being closed due to the stormy weather and rough seas around the Cape of Good Hope.

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