

Orange industry in big trouble

BY: DAVE CHAMBERS

The orange industry is facing a "disaster", with up to 40% of navels dropping off trees in the Eastern Cape. A team from Citrus Research International, in Nelspruit, is investigating the problem, which threatens to halve the harvest.



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"In my 19 years in the industry I have never seen anything like this," said Snyman Kritzinger, a farmer in the Gamtoos Valley, in the Eastern Cape, on the industry website FreshPlaza.

The loss of early and mid-season navel oranges is expected to reduce exports of 15kg cartons by between 15% and 20%. The original export estimate was 26.3 million cartons.

"At first we thought the harvest might be 30% lower but now we're thinking it might be 50% down," said Hannes de Waal, MD of the Sundays River Citrus Company.

He said it was the first time in living memory that something like this had happened on such a scale. The skin of affected oranges splits, leading to infections and the fruit dropping off the tree.

Citrus Research International's Hannes Bester blamed the disaster on the drought: "For a while now nature hasn't been playing along. In the past 18 months, we have had half our usual rainfall."

Source: The Times