

Gales strike tomato growers

By [Andrew Stone](#)

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Eastern Cape tomato farmers have suffered extensive crop and infrastructure damage, which could run into millions of rands, following the recent heavy winds.



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Andrew Emslie of Red Baron Tomatoes on the East Coast Resorts road said he had suffered approximately R50,000 worth of damage to the plastic covering of his tunnels, while also losing around R50,000- worth of crops.

"In terms of loss of income it works out at around R250,000," he said.

Emslie said a tunnel cost about R45,000 to erect and each of his tunnels could hold approximately 900 plants.

"When a storm like that hits, there is just nothing you can do except stand around and watch."

He said the wind was gusting at speeds of over 100km/h and that many tomato farmers were not insured because the excess and premiums were generally too high to make it viable, and in some cases insurance companies would not insure the tunnels.

"There are about 40 to 50 tomato farmers around the East London area and many of them have suffered similar losses.

"We've approached the Department of Agriculture for financial assistance, even if its just a contribution towards helping us replace the plastic."

On nearby Elangeni Farm, where tomatoes are grown in open fields and in tunnels, manager Martin Heuer estimated the total loss of income at around R600,000.

"We've lost about 150tons of tomatoes due to the winds," he said. "It's a significant loss for us."

Theo Scheepers, another East Coast Resorts farmer, said the wind had damaged “just about all” of his 45 tunnels to some degree.

“I've suffered between R30,000 to R40,000 damage to my plastic and close to R100,000 in loss of income.”

A Kidd's Beach tomato farmer said he had also suffered extensive losses. "There's probably around R40,000 damage to our plastic while we've also had quite a lot of crop losses.

"We're still taking stock," he said.

The farmer said it was not clear whether the losses would cause tomato prices to rise.

“If there's significant demand and a shortage of tomatoes, then the price will go up,” he said.

Leon Coetzee, a general manager in the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture, said the department would be willing to assist the farmers but the department did not have its own disaster fund and had to apply to the National Disaster Fund and meet its criteria.

“Right now we're waiting for a draft report from the farmers and will then send out our engineers to assess the damage and apply for funding should it be feasible to do so.”

Source: Daily Dispatch

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