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Belize banana assessment underway



The country's banana industry has been rocked by two severe storms that hit earlier in the month

Damage assessments are underway in Belize following two severe storms that have impacted on the country's banana sector, damaging a significant proportion of this season's crop.

Initial estimates from the country's Banana Growers Association (BGA) suggested that some 40 per cent of crops had been eliminated by the storms, at a cost of around US\$15m-US\$20m, local media reported.

The cooperative exports solely to tropical produce group Fyffes, shipping a yearly quota of around 4.5m boxes, with the BGA expressing concern that the high standards set by the importer would leave many of its weather-hit bananas short of the standards required.

However, BGA stakeholders said that it could take up to three months to fully assess the damage, something that could be delayed further by yet more damaging weather this week.

A source at Fyffes told Eurofruit: "Last night (11 September) was the third night of strong winds in the area. Assessment and counting is still underway but wind damage appears to be very localised."

Meanwhile, agriculture minister Rene Montero visited growing areas this week to make his own assessment of the damage, describing the damage as serious but refusing to call it a 'crisis'.

"It's very hard to get a figure right now, but (there is) an estimation of about US\$5m-US\$10m

that they will need immediately to recover," he told 7 News Belize.

"I don't think it's a crisis because most of the bananas that were damaged, the farmers were already harvesting, and are already preparing for export," Montero added. "I think that if we can get our act together, and the line of credit can be created from DFC and the Social Security Board – immediately – I think that within six months to nine months the banana industry can recover, and continue to export to the level that they were exporting a week ago."