



By Carl Collen

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## St Lucia sees banana industry 'wiped out'



Country's agriculture minister says that the industry could take up to eight months to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Tomas

**A**gricultural officials in the Caribbean Island nation of St Lucia are continuing to count the losses in the wake of Hurricane Tomas, which struck the region with force last week, causing widespread damage and claiming an estimated 14 lives in the country.

St Lucia's banana industry in particular has suffered major losses, according to agriculture minister Ezekiel Joseph, who described it to local media as being "wiped out", adding that it could take some eight months before the industry recovers enough to resume exports.

"As a country, we may be able to export bananas in May or June 2011, and that is dependent on what percentage of the fields are snapped," he explained. "If we have a higher percentage of snapped fields then we should be able to export by May or June 2011."

Mr Joseph added that, if there were to be a need for "total rehabilitation" of the industry, the country should be able to capitalise on a period when WINFRESH and the key UK market have high demand for bananas.

"So, whilst there are a

lot of sad stories, there are opportunities for a country to capitalise on what is happening right now," he added.

On a wider scale, prime-minister Stephenson King has revealed that it could cost up to US\$500m (€358m) to repair the infrastructural damage caused by the Hurricane, Caribbean 360 reported.