



By Gabrielle Easter

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Growers assess damage from Cyclone Debbie

Tomatoes and capsicums are likely to be in short supply as Cyclone Debbie ravages Queensland's winter crops



The aftermath of Cyclone Debbie is still being assessed on Queensland's central coast as heavy rains and flash flooding hit the south east of the state.

While Queensland's major banana growing regions were relatively unscathed by the cyclone, a Category Four storm when it hit onshore with winds around 260km per hour, vegetable growers in the region were hit hard just as they were planting winter crops.

Horticulture is Queensland's second largest primary industry, valued at more than A\$2.8bn each year, and the major producer of the country's winter supply of tomatoes and capsicums.

Cherry Emerick of Bowen Gumlu Growers Association, the representative body for Australia's largest winter vegetable growing region, told Produce Plus that they were still in the process of compiling information on the extent of the crop damage.

"There are definitely some plantings that

are gone or completely destroyed. We're still trying to contact growers at the moment," Emerick said. "We're still assessing the damage and it will probably change daily.

"The next step will be getting out to the farms to see where growers need help, whether it's with machinery, labour or financial assistance."

Emerick said the wild weather of last night had subsided, with the sun coming out and growers hoping for a dry night ahead. The town of Bowen is still without water supply and with power lines down around the region, many homes are still without electricity.

Queensland Farmers' Federation president Stuart Armitage said while the initial impact of the Category 4 storm had passed, rains and winds were still a threat to growers in South East Queensland.

"Although it is early days, the region is worth over A\$1bn to Queensland's agricultural production value so it would

be fair to assume that the damage will be at least hundreds of millions of dollars," said Armitage. "Contact with farmers continues to be difficult as many properties remain isolated by flood waters and communication channels via landline or mobile phone are inconsistent.

"As the system moves inland and southward the expected high rainfall will most likely result in flooding in regions that were not initially impacted by the cyclone."

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology has issued flash flood warnings from the Whitsundays to the New South Wales border.

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