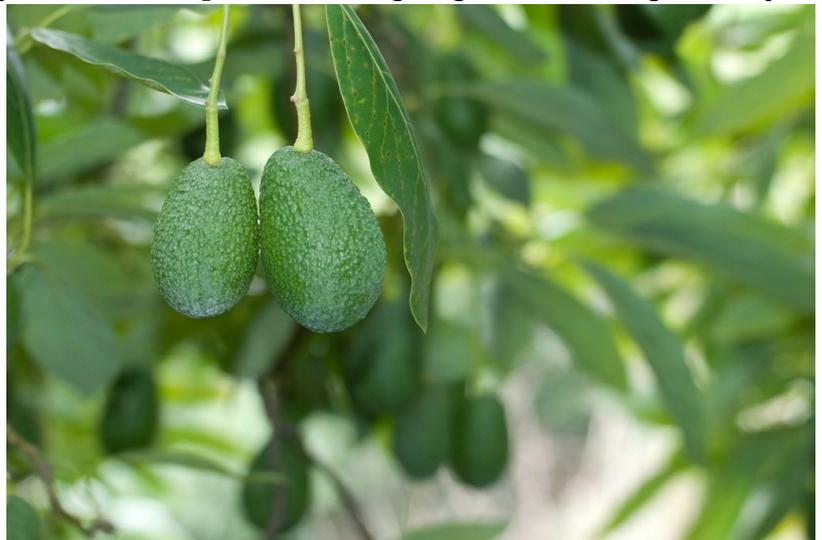


Media reports surrounding Cyclone Debbie may have focused on crops like sugarcane, winter vegetables and mangoes, but the ensuing storms, winds and heavy rainfall raised concerns for other crops around Queensland and northern New South Wales. At Fresh Fruit Portal we checked in with representatives of two other commodities that have been on the rise in recent years - avocados and blueberries - for a status update.

General indications from the sectors are that negative effects of the cyclone itself and the resulting weather have been relatively minor, with potential fungus growth among the key concerns.



Avocados Australia CEO John Tyas said it seemed there had not been serious damage to the industry, but emphasized the information he had so far received may not tell the whole story.

"Generally there are virtually no avocado orchards in that region where the cyclone crossed the coast, which was fortunate for the industry," he said.

"Just south of there though there are some orchards...and then the rain depression came through the southeast and there are a lot of orchards down through there.

"From the reports that I've had there hasn't been a lot of serious damage. There's been some orchards with some fruit knocked off and some blemished fruit from the winds."

Fortunately it seemed flooding in avocado growing areas had not been too severe, he said, adding much of the production was based in the high country.

"I was concerned about Bundaberg if there was going to be some major flooding again, but that hasn't happened to the extent that it did a few years ago," he said.

"So as long as growers can manage the tree health in terms of the phytophthora root rot management, fingers crossed we've sort of dodged a bullet."

Tyas explained there were some delays in getting fruit to market, but the situation was now returning to normal.

While the heavy rainfall would likely benefit much of the east coast in terms of refilling water reservoirs, he said levels in the Atherton Tablelands' main dam remained "very low".

A representative of grower-owned business Avolution echoed Tyas' comments, saying the impacts of the cyclone had been "relatively minor".

"The cyclone hit right in the middle of two of the bigger growing regions," CEO Antony Allen said.

"It was more about disruptions of transport systems. There was rain which was over relatively quickly - it wasn't like five or six years ago when we had continuous downpours."

He said there had been at least a couple of affected growers in the area between Bundaberg and North Queensland, but there was a "very small" impact in the state overall.

There were some transport delays in the Bundaberg region and harvesting had been temporarily halted last week, but Allen said winds had helped to dry out the orchards quickly and picking had resumed on Monday.

"They're back up and running but obviously getting fruit back into the system after having a week of not picking or packing means that the market is just holding itself," he said.

"It shouldn't have too much effect on prices going forward as long as we don't have any more weather that prevents us from harvesting."

The vast majority of production is destined for the domestic market, but there are also some exports into Asia.

No serious problems for blueberry growers

Australia's east coast blueberry industry was even less affected than the avocado sector, largely due to the location of plantings and the timing of the cyclone during the off-season.

"The industry wasn't affected," Australian Blueberry Growers' Association (ABGA) president

Greg McCulloch said.

"The growers I've spoken to have escaped any serious problems, so we dodged a bullet."

The organization's vice president Gurmeh Singh, who is based in northern New South Wales, said growing areas had not received as much wind or rainfall as those further north.

"The biggest effect for us might be some fungus creeping in with all the wet weather," he said.

"As far as we know no farms were actually affected by the flooding and, because this is our off-season, production or harvesting wasn't affected either."

He said if the wet weather continued for much longer the effects of fungus may be reflected on the flowering period, but he highlighted that the soil tended to drain quickly.

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