

# Heavy rainfall dampens farmers' moods



Midmar Dam's water levels have increased due to heavy rainfall

**F**armers in certain parts of the province are concerned for their livelihoods as a result of the heavy rainfalls experienced recently.

KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (Kwanalu) CEO, Sandy La Marque said that it is hard to give a generalised overview on the matter, however there are certain areas in the province that have encountered difficulties due to heavy rainfall.

"We have had complaints from farmers whose crops have been completely covered by water which makes it difficult for them to lift the produce. This is a cause for concern because if they can't get into the fields, this will impact the produce supply in the area. The real concern, however, is the effect on the farm roads. The heavy rains have caused the roads to deteriorate significantly

which means farmers are unable to move produce. This has a profound effect on this sector," she said.

"However, some farmers are extremely grateful for the rains, because last year they suffered due to severe drought in the area."

Umgeni Water's Corporate Stakeholder Manager, Shami Harichunder commented on the matter explaining that almost every dam in the province has experienced an increase in water levels. According to Harichunder, Mearns Weir Dam in Mooi River has been full and spilling over for several weeks. Locally, Midmar Dam's levels moved from 73% - 79% and Albert Falls Dam moved from 79% - 82% from mid-December 2010 to mid-January 2011.

Harichunder reassured residents that Umgeni water is in constant contact with Weather Services about possible threatening weather forecasts and dams are monitored on a daily basis.

"If we receive information from the Weather Services about a threatening situation, the municipalities are made aware of that as soon as possible, as per legislation requirements' he said.

When asked if the sluices would be opened to decrease dam levels, he commented that when dams are full and spilling, the sluice gates are opened to get rid of dirty water from the bottom of the dam, but it is done in a controlled manner unless there is too much water spilling over the dam.

"In this case, municipalities and their disaster management sections get involved and inform downstream communities. However, the dams on the Mgeni River are still not full yet, so the sluices will not be opened anytime soon."

When asked if the heavy rainfall is a cause for concern, or in fact, beneficial, Harichunder responded by saying, "From a flood management perspective, it is always a concern to have heavy rains when dams are full. This is the reason why this becomes a collective effort where municipalities, Department of Water Affairs and Umgeni Water work together. Heavy rainfall is useful when dams are near to empty", he said.

