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## **AUSTRALIAN PAPAYA AND PAPAW INDUSTRY: DOWN, BUT NOT OUT**

One month since the devastation of cyclone Larry, papaya and papaw growers are still reeling from the effects, with between 60% - 95% loss of fruit bearing trees in Australia's two main growing areas of Innisfail and Mareeba.

Damage has seen some papaya and papaw trees completely torn from the ground, but in most cases the trees were snapped off above the base by the 290km/ph winds of cyclone Larry. "This year's crop would have been worth about \$18-\$20 million dollars to the local economy and now it is destroyed," says Papaya Australia representative, Max Bell.

According to Max, "The majority of papaya and papaw growers still do not have power or telephone connections restored, so it has been difficult to get an exact idea of the extent they have been affected, even in the less devastated fringes of the cyclone affected area."

Government funding and general support of the Innisfail and Mareeba community will be crucial for the re-establishment of the growers and the industry.

"It will take anywhere from 9 to 18 months for us to start to get back to where we were before the cyclone hit," says Max. The devastation of individual properties is so great that not all growers will recover from the financial losses.

The industry anticipates that availability of papaya and papaw should be headed back towards normal levels by January 2007. The good news is that in the meantime, papaya and papaw will not totally disappear from our supermarket shelves. "There are some farmers not quite so badly affected by the cyclone; with intensive management of their remaining trees, they will be able to keep their crop producing after the shock of Larry's winds" says Max.

Papaya and papaw is usually harvested 52 weeks a year, growers are used to living with the threat of storms and occasional cyclones, but category five cyclone Larry defied their best preparation efforts, "It is a disaster that no-one can be entirely ready for" says Max.

Since Larry's hit, growers have been resilient; assessing damage to their homes and buildings, and planning the best way to re-build their livelihoods and the papaya and papaw industry.

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[www.australianpapaya.com.au](http://www.australianpapaya.com.au)

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