

# Donations stream in for farm-workers

Many of the thousands of workers who went on a two-week strike for better pay last month got only a fraction of their wages. Some of them got nothing.



Tina Joemat-Pettersson.  
(Image: GCIS)

Last week, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Tina Joemat-Pettersson called on South Africans to help the farm-workers by giving them food to avert a crisis.

She said Christmas was a time for giving and some people have heeded her call.

Food Bank SA has pledged to donate food and provide distribution support. Its premises in Epping, Cape Town, will be used as a drop-off point.

"Several responses have been forthcoming from companies, retailers and organisations that would like to make contributions," Joemat-Pettersson's spokesman, Palesa Mokomele said.

Anton Rabe, chairman of Agri SA's labour committee, said his organisation was also willing to help.

"We inquired last week about how we can help. [We are] awaiting feedback from the department," Rabe said.

At a press conference in parliament last Wednesday (4 December), the minister said she met community leaders and unions concerned about the "lack of food for families".

The strike was called off on Tuesday (3 December) to allow negotiations for improved wages to continue.

"I do not think we should consider the situation to be completely calm. Any uncertainty could flare up into an unpleasant situation.

"So we call on South Africa to assist us to mitigate the risk of having an inhumane situation developing in this area," she said.

When *The Times* visited De Doorns, in the Hex River Valley, last week, residents of the Stofland informal settlement - home mostly to seasonal farm-workers - complained they had not eaten for days.

Nosey Pieterse, president of the Black Association for the Agricultural Sector, said about 6,000 families in the Hex River Valley participated in the strike. Pieterse said many workers lost two weeks' wages - about R700.

"Those people have always been in need. They are more in need than before. The situation is worse than people understand," Pieterse said.

"For the first time farm-workers' issues are being highlighted and have reached the national agenda," Pieterse added.

Cosatu said negotiations would continue for a R150-a -day minimum wage and the strike will resume if there is no agreement by January 9.

Source: *The Times* via I-Net Bridge

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