

# Outside influences are abusing wage issue to promote labour unrest

"Outside influences with little interest in the welfare of agriculture and workers are abusing the minimum wage issue to promote labour unrest, which in the short to long term will have dire consequences for those who have a direct interest in agriculture," said Johannes Möller, president of Agri SA.

Agri SA, along with other agricultural organisations, met with the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Tina Joemat-Pettersson, in Pretoria recently to discuss the labour unrest in the Western Cape. There was consensus that the situation is serious and cannot be ascribed only to the determined minimum wage.

Other factors include amongst others a strive for competing unions to get a foothold in agriculture, tension between the work status of Lesotho and Zimbabweans due to a differentiated position by the government in this regard, the mobilising of unemployed and persons unrelated to the issue for political gain and unsatisfactory service delivery by local government structures in the informal sector.

## No legal right

"The minimum wage in agriculture is determined by the Basic Condition of Employment Act and is reviewed annually in March. In 2012 it was adjusted above inflation. Agri SA, nor any other agricultural organisation, have the legal right to act on behalf of farmers in respect to the minimum wage negotiations, as being demanded in the Western Cape at this time.

Agri SA cannot be part of a dispensation that will undermine the statutory and legal rules that shape the environment within which the agricultural sector operates. However, this does not prevent any farmer from negotiating with his own workers on wages. In this regard Agri SA has encouraged farmers, where possible, to pay above the minimum wage," said Möller.

## Against this background, Agri SA and Joemat-Pettersson agreed that:

- The government's cooperation is sought to reject inflammatory and inciting utterances by politicians;
- Police must assist to prevent intimidation and incitement to violence, including the bussing in of persons not directly involved in the sector's wage dispute;
- Farmers and their workers should be given the opportunity to negotiate minimum wages without external interference;
- Other ministers are requested to urgently give attention to issues not related to minimum wages; and
- The Western Cape government is requested to urgently provide attention to specific service delivery problems experienced at local government level.

## **Influence of seasonal workers**

It has come to Agri SA's attention that the wage grievances are largely raised by seasonal workers and their sympathisers, who are applying pressure on permanent farm workers. This information has been brought to the attention of Joemat-Pettersson, as well as that other cost increases - apart from wage demands - such as electricity, water and diesel could result in structural changes in the agricultural sector.

These factors are apparently not being taken into account by the leaders of the labour unrest. Should the labour unrest expand further it can result in certain commodities experiencing a negative impact on agricultural production and marketing. A direct negative impact on food security, employment and trade can, under these circumstances, be foreseen.

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