

No pay unless table grapes are harvested

Western Cape provincial agricultural minister Gerrit van Rensburg has expressed concern the renewed agricultural strike will damage the economically important table grape crop that is ripe for harvesting.

By [Paul Vecchiato](#) 10 Jan 2013

On Wednesday (9 January) Van Rensburg visited the De Doorns area, the heartland of table grape farming in the province and the epicentre of the current strike action.

"There is a crop ready for harvesting and if this doesn't happen there will be no pay for any workers," he said.

This is the third wave of labour unrest to hit the area since early November as workers have been demanding an increase in their daily pay from R69 to R150. They are also demanding improved living and working conditions.

"Whether the strike continues or not the minimum wage is being reviewed and this will be finalised in March," Van Rensburg said.

He was referring to Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant's declaration that she would hold public consultations on the wage sectoral determination for the agricultural sector.

There are about 100 farms in the De Doorns that employ about 8,000 permanent workers and another 8,000 seasonal workers.

"What worries me is that there is very little farming activity taking place, even though most of the permanent workers have come to work," Van Rensburg said.

Van Rensburg said he had received anecdotal evidence that workers who received food aid packages from various non-governmental organisations and unions just before Christmas were told this obligated them to strike.

"These are the allegations that were made to me and I don't know who distributed the packages," he said.

Van Rensburg said organisations that had been calling for the strikes had to take responsibility for them.

"It is not sufficient to make strong statements that workers must be militant and then step back and say this is a worker-led strike and we are just advising them," he said.

SA Police Service spokesperson Lt-Col Andre Traut said that about 50 people had been arrested on public violence charges.

Agri Wes-Cape spokesperson Porchia Adams said that at least 75% of permanent workers had reported for work on Wednesday (9 January) but only about half of the seasonal workers had arrived.

"We have received widespread reports of intimidation in various places such as De Doorns and Grabouw. One talked of the occupants of a white minibus taxi vehicle in De Doorns threatening to 'kill' anyone who w

to work, and the police have been informed," she said.

Hex River Valley Table Grape Growers Association chairman Michael Laubscher said part of the current grape crop had already been harvested and that the farms could cope with harvesting using a reduced workforce for at least another two weeks.

"Most of the farmers picked as much as they could over the past week and the crop that is still on the vine not ripe yet," he said.

Laubscher said farm workers had been told that if they received food parcels they were obliged to strike.

"I don't know who exactly handed out the food parcels over the past two days, but they have now put the workers under an obligation to strike," he said.

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