

Farmer, Cosatu at loggerheads over deal

The Western Cape grape farmer who has made a commitment to pay a minimum wage of R105 a day to workers has accused the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) of not sticking to its side of an agreement.



Cape Orchids Company director and farmer Gerhard de Kock was reacting on Wednesday to statements made on Tuesday by Cosatu Western Cape provincial secretary Tony Ehrenreich that a deal had been struck in the Clanwilliam area.

Ehrenreich told *Sapa* the agreement, which would see workers being paid a minimum daily wage of R105, up from the current R69, had been reached with a significant number of farmers.

He said the agreement would be used as a model for similar deals if farmers' association Agri SA agreed it on Wednesday (16 January).

However, De Kock said he had not signed an agreement but had made a commitment to implement the new wage from the first quarter of this year.

In return, Cosatu would undertake that his and other farmers' workers would return to work on Wednesday.

"Cosatu are not playing ball. Workers in the Hex River Valley, in particular, have not returned to work despite Cosatu's promises," he said.

De Kock said he had made the commitment on behalf of the following farms: Sigma and Arcadia, in Clanwilliam; Lombardy, Tweespruit, De Doorns House Estate, Somerlus, Exhex, Normadie, Elspiek, Mordc and Idle Winds in the Hex River Valley; Medoc and Duiker Kloof, in Carnarvon; and Langwater in Touwsrivier.

All these farms are associated with Cape Orchids Company either through direct ownership or a management contract.

De Kock said the commitment for the new minimum wage applied to about 1,000 farm workers, who he claimed were not unionised.

"These workers are allowed the right of association. But they don't want to be unionised and so Cosatu do not represent them," he said.

De Kock said the combined annual output of these farms was about 4m boxes of table grapes.

The area is currently at the height of the table grape harvesting season.

The town of De Doorns is the centre of the main table grape area of the Hex River Valley and has been the main flashpoint of the recent strike action.

On Tuesday (15 January) a man died after allegedly being hit by rubber bullets in an incident linked to the strike, which the Independent Police Investigations Directorate is investigating.

The Department of Labour is due to hold its third round of public hearings on farm worker wages in De Doorns on Wednesday evening.

Workers have been demanding that their minimum daily wage is increased to R150.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>