

Philippi farmers challenge City on development of agricultural land

By [Madison Yauger](#)

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Farmers and workers held posters and sang on the steps of the Western Cape High Court on Tuesday. They were protesting against plans to rezone part of the Philippi Horticultural Area (PHA) in Cape Town for development.



Farmers and workers from the Philippi Horticultural Area demonstrated on the steps of the Western Cape High Court on Tuesday.
Photo: Madison Yauger

The Philippi Horticultural Area Food and Farming Campaign and its convenor Nazeer Sondag have brought a case against the City of Cape Town and the MEC for Local Development, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning contesting “administrative decisions” that allowed the rezoning of a portion of the PHA for mixed-use development.

The campaign says the PHA has been farmed for over 130 years, providing 80% of Cape Town’s carrots as well as 200,000 tonnes of vegetables per year, and is indirectly connected to 30,000 jobs. It’s also “the primary recharge zone of the Cape Flats Aquifer and could potentially (with a proper aquifer management plan) provide one third of Cape Town’s potable water”.

“This particular court case is precedent-setting. If we lose, we will lose the rest of the Philippi Horticultural Area, and the Cape Flats Aquifer,” said Sondag. “Everyone is affected by what happens to the PHA.”

The case focuses on Oakland City Development Company and the land it aims to develop. Advocate Murray Bridgman, for the campaign, argued that the proposed developments ignore the PHA's continued role in food security, heritage, the Cape Flats Aquifer and its potential for land reform.

Bridgman also questioned whether the national Department of Agriculture should have jurisdiction to determine if the land in question is considered "agricultural" under the Subdivision of Agricultural Land Act.



James-Brent Styan, media liaison officer for the MEC, said: "Claims that we want to pave over the PHA are incorrect. There's a core PHA area where the farming happens, about 1,900 hectares. That area is not in court today. That area is already protected by the Municipal Spatial Development Framework, which has defined that area as a critical natural area, so nothing can be developed there."

"It's not about taking any land away from anybody. It's about a technical process that was followed with the decision-making process taken years ago."

Advocate Ron Paschke, representing the City, said no part of Oakland's land is currently farmed, providing no food and no farming jobs. Paschke argued that the Oakland land is excluded from the PHA and that the aquifer would actually be better protected through the city's stormwater management policy. Farming, he said, causes harm to the aquifer through fertiliser usage.

He emphasised the need for development in Cape Town. "This land will provide houses for 15,000 families and schools for their children." Some of the housing would be low-cost, he added.

But Sunday said there were other areas where social housing could be built, near infrastructure, jobs and transport.

The City's argument continues on Wednesday. Judge Kate Savage is presiding over the case.

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