

South Africa: CGA slams “opportunistic political posturing” in citrus worker strike

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has slammed “opportunistic political posturing” taking place in the industry, which has been affected by a strike over recent days.



Local media report that workers are demanding higher wages, but one of the companies affected has reportedly accused South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco) of inciting workers to strike.

The situation is estimated to have already cost the industry millions of dollars, with exporters having been unable to ship thousands of tons of fruit.

The CGA said in a June 5 statement that it and the industry “will continue to support farm workers in raising legitimate labour concerns and – equally – protect everyone in the industry from opportunistic political posturing.”

“This past week has seen sporadic incidents of labour unrest in the citrus industry in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo regions. In the Sundays River area, operations have been brought to a standstill as uncertainty and misinformation regarding wages created uncertainty and an opportunity for political parties and other organisations to foster discontent.”

“Misinformation being spread by certain organisations is actively undermining legitimate discussions aimed at resolving the situation amicably.

“Non-government and political organisations claiming to represent worker interests, for instance, are willfully ignoring the additional services that many farm owners provide to their employees, including housing, schooling for their children, daily crèches and healthcare.”

It went on to say that where there is any alleged mistreatment of farm workers, it is calling on those affected to not only report these incidents to the authorities but to also inform the CGA.

“Any standstill in an industry that works with a perishable product not only affects production on the farms, but also negatively affects the entire value chain including farm workers, growers, packers, transporters, and importers, all of whom are prevented from doing their jobs,” it said.

“All employees deserve fair pay, and we trust that this matter will be addressed with the urgency it deserves. At the same time everyone must remain vigilant of political opportunism that seeks to use people’s valid concerns as fodder for their own aims and ambitions.”

Local media [Herald Live](#) recently reported that workers are demanding a 13% wage increase.

The companies affected include the Sundays River Citrus Company (SRCC), Unifruitti, Sun Citrus Packers, Citrus Run and Golden Ridge, according to the publication. SRCC CEO Hannes de Waal reportedly said his company had offered workers a 10% increase last Saturday.

"Some of our workers desperately want to return to work because this strike has had devastating effects on their families," he was quoted as saying.

Effects on industry

In a statement sent to *Fresh Fruit Portal*, SRCC marketing manager Erik Stroebel said it is very difficult to ascertain what every exporter in the Sundays River Valley would have exported this week, but explained there has definitely been a drop in exports over recent days.

The main varieties being packed for export are lemons, Navels, Cara Cara and Novas, he said.

"There is some fruit that was harvested before the strike started and these fruits are a big concern now because it still not packed," he said.

"Furthermore, marketing and sales opportunities are lost, not only to capitalise on for instance the good European lemon market, but also firm programs.

"I estimate that in the last 7 days the industry missed packing and shipping opportunities for at least 520 containers ($\pm$ 13,000 tons of fruit), with an estimate FOB of USD 13m. As the strike continues this number would increase."

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