

South Africa: Citrus strike ends as two sides reach wage agreement

South African workers in the Sundays River Valley in the Eastern Cape called off their strike on Thursday after reaching an agreement with their employers, according to local media [Times Live](#).



The strike started last week with workers demanding a minimum wage of R20 (US\$1.50) an hour. Most were earning R16.80 (US\$1.30) an hour, the publication reported.

Citrus operations in the region were brought to a standstill for several days, with affected companies including the Sundays River Citrus Company (SRCC), Unifruitti, Sun Citrus Packers, Citrus Run and Golden Ridge.

An SRCC representative said estimated earlier this week that the industry had already missed packing and shipping opportunities for at least 520 containers, with an estimate FOB of US\$13 million.

Thursday's agreement was reportedly facilitated by the Eastern Cape MEC for Rural Development and Agrarian Reforms, Xolile Nqatha.

On Wednesday Nqatha abandoned a rally in Kirkwood after protesters who had gathered to listen to him threatened his delegation. The MEC eventually left Kirkwood without addressing the workers.

He went on to Addo where he addressed about 2,000 workers gathered at the Valencia Sportsfield, telling them he was talking to farmers to persuade them to agree to the R20 an hour wage, and to stop employing workers from other countries at lower wages.

"We don't hate our African brothers but we encourage them to accept government set wages. We don't want them to be exploited when there are platforms to engage with the farmers to improve their living conditions," Nqatha was quoted as saying.

SRCC chairman Hannes de Waal said the organization regretted the violence and damage to the farms but looked forward to "welcoming all our workers back to the farms tomorrow, Friday, 8 June."

He said the new statutory minimum wage for farm workers – to be effective soon – was R18 an hour but citrus workers had demanded the national minimum hourly wage of R20 recently passed by Parliament.

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