

Witzenberg municipality, South Africa

COVID-19 scare for Cape farmworkers

Officials bordering one of the Western Cape's COVID-19 hot spots are urging citrus farmers to protect their laborers. On Saturday, Cederberg mayor Sylvia Qunta and councillor Francois Kamfer were contacted after traffic police and the police intercepted a truck from Wolseley in the Witzenberg municipality carrying farmworkers.

Of the 38, two were screened and found with high temperatures at the weekend. As of Sunday, Witzenberg had recorded 204 COVID-19 cases, the highest for a single municipality outside the Cape Town metropole.

“Given the enormous risk and fact that two people already showed high temperatures, the decision was taken that these workers would not be allowed entry into Citrusdal,” said Cederberg municipal manager Henry Slimmert.

Owner of ALG Boerdery, Gerrit van der Merwe, was contacted and agreed that the workers should return, and at about 7pm the truck with all 38 farmworkers was escorted to Wolseley. “There are roughly 2000 people from the informal settlement of Riverview who work on the citrus farms every day,” said Slimmert. “Despite the large number of people employed by the citrus industry, there are still hundreds of local people unemployed.”

Qunta said they would be stepping up efforts to protect residents and the citrus industry. “We want to appeal to our commercial farmers not to put our people at risk, and to use local labour, as there are hundreds of unemployed people in the Citrusdal area.

“I want to thank our law enforcement officers and SAPS for their excellent work and the manner in which the matter was handled,” added Qunta.

The Cederberg municipality serves the towns of Clanwilliam, Citrusdal, Lambert's Bay, Graafwater and Elands Bay.

Over the past week, the provincial government has adopted a Whole of Government response plan to curb COVID-19 in densely populated areas and where there was a high transmission rate. Hot spots identified were the eight sub-districts in Cape Town and one sub-district in the Cape Winelands. Premier Alan Winde has said that based on research by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, more than 200,000 jobs might be lost in the province.

Source: [iol.co.za \(https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/covid-19-scare-for-cape-farmworkers-in-witzenberg-municipality-48081683\)](https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/covid-19-scare-for-cape-farmworkers-in-witzenberg-municipality-48081683)

Publication date: Tue 19 May 2020

