

Farm workers demand transparency on pesticide regulations

By [Liezl Human](#)

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About 70 people from organisations and unions representing farm dwellers and workers protested outside Parliament in Cape Town on Friday. They are calling for transparency and consultation over regulations on pesticides.



Farm dweller and workers' organisations protested outside Parliament on Friday, calling for transparency around pesticide regulations. Photo: Liezl Human

Colette Solomon, director at Women on Farms Project, said, "The process to date has not been transparent and has not involved farm workers and dwellers."

The picket follows recent regulations by the former Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development which gazetted guidelines for exemptions on pesticide use. This is not the first time the organisation has [protested](#) outside Parliament over the issue.

The department has now been split into two ministries, with DA party leader John Steenhuisen as Minister of Agriculture.

Solomon said that farm workers were concerned about the party's [stances](#) on freezing or abandoning the national minimum wage and its free market policies.

In response to GroundUp, Steenhuisen said, "Given that I was only sworn in as Minister of Agriculture on Wednesday, it is unfortunate and premature for any group to protest against my appointment ... without first giving me a chance to indicate what lies ahead."

He said he will have an open door policy. "There is no need to protest. They are most welcome to meet me directly and raise their issues and concerns," he said.

A seasonal farm worker, Nicolene McGee, said that she has frequently worked in vineyards without protective clothing after pesticides were sprayed.

As a seasonal worker, she only has employment eight months of the year. "We already can't survive on the minimum wage," she said.

Vainola Makan, programme manager at the Surplus People's Project, said farm workers' "[right to health has been taken away](#)", and that there has been no dialogue with those most affected by pesticides.

Organisations that joined the picket included African Centre for Biodiversity, the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union, South African People's Tribunal on Agrottoxins, Sovereign Agroecology and Food Empowerment, and Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth.

In a joint statement, the organisations also rejected the draft [regulations](#) for hazardous chemical agents of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which falls under the Department of Employment and Labour.

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