

# Agriculture sector expects job-loss bloodbath, with 50,000 possibly out of work

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The Western Cape is facing a jobs bloodbath as 50,000 workers in the agriculture sector might get the sack due to the drought.



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A rise in prices for some vegetables and fruit may also be on the cards as farmers have been forced to cut production.

## A grim picture of the agricultural sector

During a presentation to parliament yesterday, Western Cape Local Government Department head Graham Paulse painted a grim picture of the agricultural sector.

"[On] social welfare, the impact [will be] significant," he said. "It is estimated that there will be agricultural job losses in the region of 50,000." He said the layoffs could lead to social and humanitarian problems. In addition, many of the affected workers might move to the Cape Town metro or other towns to find work.

"[The impact on agriculture] is significant. In Ceres, 50% less onions and 50% less potatoes have been planted. "That is a

direct result of the water shortages in that area, with an estimated loss of about R40m in wages to agri-workers," Pause said.

"The factory in Lutzville that makes puree out of tomatoes has actually closed for the season."

He said deciduous fruit farmers expected a 20% smaller crop and smaller fruit would yield lower profits. Last year, farmers produced smaller fruit than they had in 2015. Pause said this had resulted in losses of about R720m. Farmers have resorted to removing the flowers from trees so they cannot bear fruit as there is not enough water. "They are taking out all orchards to limit the use of water and also they are cutting back on about 30% of the citrus fruit trees," he said.

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The key wine industry has not been spared. "A 5% reduction in the vine production is equivalent to a R175m loss at the farm gates, with the value chain [loss being] about R525m," he said.

Grain farmers would not harvest this year. They would, instead, allow livestock to graze in their fields. There was a shortage of fodder and some farmers were slaughtering their livestock as a result.

## Day Zero

Pause's presentation comes amid fears that the City of Cape Town may run out of water by March unless water consumption is reduced.

However, Local Government MEC Anton Bredell and Cape Town's mayoral committee member responsible for water, Xanthea Limberg, showcased the city's plans to avert "Day Zero" - the day the taps run dry. Both have called for more funding for plans such as desalination plants.

Water and Sanitation Minister Nomvula Mokonyane assured the committee that her department had been working with the city and province during the drought disaster."

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