

Chicken imports a threat to SA poultry industry jobs

As the local chicken industry tightens its belt due to an increase in the dumping of imported chicken on the South African market, workers face retrenchments instead of Christmas bonuses.



Larry Pana via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Local producer RCL Foods joined forces with the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) in a march protesting the ongoing threat to job security, which took place in Pietermaritzburg. Some 350 protesters marched from the Mayors Walk to the KZN Provincial Legislature where a memorandum was handed over to Advocate Linda Zama, advisor to KZN Premier, Willies Mchunu.

“It is with a heavy heart that we reduce production at our Hammarsdale plant, when it means one thing – our workforce has to shrink too, which affects breadwinners, families, and entire communities,” said Scott Pitman, the MD of RCL FOODS Consumer Division, who showed a united front with FAWU General Secretary Katishi Masemola, along with a number of RCL FOODS Executives.

Pitman confirmed that RCL FOODS will halve production from January 2017 at its Hammarsdale plant and that 1,350 workers are affected so far. The situation will be monitored closely in the coming months and further cutbacks may become necessary should the market situation not improve.

Poultry industry insiders have warned that for every 10,000 tonnes of dumped chicken imported as many as 1,000 jobs

may be lost, with as many as 6,000 jobs affected across the industry by the end of 2016. The industry might not survive in its current state for another 12 months.

The South African Poultry Association (SAPA) has pointed out that once the local industry has been forced to shut down, the country will be at the mercy of foreign producers who can raise prices or, if better prices are offered elsewhere, switch their sales to other markets. Chicken is the main source of protein for many South African consumers, and the industry that produces it provides a livelihood for over 130,000 workers. The potential disaster is obvious.

“We can’t stand by and let a predatory practice like dumping destroy a sustainable, 100% local industry. We support government in its efforts to resolve the challenges facing the chicken industry in South Africa,” says Pitman.

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