

Farm women demand Distell act against suppliers that violate workers' rights

About 150 women who live and work on farms marched to the offices of Distell in Stellenbosch on Wednesday, demanding that the company take action against its suppliers that disregard human and labour rights.



Source: [GroundUp](#) | About 150 women who live and work on farms with members of the Women on Farms Project marched to Distell in Stellenbosch on Wednesday afternoon. Photos: Ashraf Hendricks

Many workers on farms across the Western Cape regularly experience labour rights violations, as well as a lack of sanitation, forceful evictions, and food insecurity, according to the Women on Farms Project (WFP) which coordinated the march.

Distell produces many well-known alcoholic drinks like Savanna cider, Amarula, Klipdrift brandy and a range of wines.

WFP director Colette Solomon said that Distell had recently announced “record growth” at the end of its financial year. While the company celebrates its profits, seasonal workers who actually produce and harvest the produce are bracing themselves for tough months ahead, she said.

"For seasonal workers this is the start of food shortages in the house. This is the start of going into debt just to feed your family, or living off social grants," said Solomon.

According to their memo, the farm women are demanding that Distell prevent and mitigate labour rights violations and housing rights violations; provide WFP with a list of all its supplying farms; for the company to publicly commit to the redistribution of farmland to women farmworkers; and commit to meeting with the WFP to discuss their grievances in detail. A Distell representative accepted and signed the memo.



Source: [GroundUp](#) | Marchers demanded that Distell prevent and mitigate labour rights violations and housing rights violations committed by its suppliers. They also want the company to provide the Women on Farms Project with a list of all its supplying farms, among other demands.

Linda Norman from Wolseley told GroundUp, "We work in the vineyard, we grow it, we prune it, we work with the fruit, but we get the least money ... We are the ones working for it." Norman said that many farm dwellers live without electricity, water, or toilets. "It's more difficult now than it used to be," she said.

Elsie Cupido from Paarl said many women working on farms are still paid below the minimum wage and are at a greater risk of being evicted from their homes.

Distell spokesperson Dennis Matsane said that the conditions and pay at all Distell-owned farms "far exceed the prescribed standards".

Matsane said dialogue and engagement are key to finding solutions to transform the wine industry. "While the company does not represent 'commercial farmers' in either the Western Cape or in South Africa, as a leading player in the wine industry and a key proponent of the industry's transformation, we accepted the memorandum."

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