

As farm workers entered another possible day of strike action, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) called for a boycott of fruit producers that do not meet its standards. 

Cosatu's provincial secretary for the Western Cape, Tony Ehrenreich, said the boycott was called on the behalf of workers facing "apartheid slave conditions on farms."

"This is only a boycott for those companies who don't want to comply with decent conditions and those companies will be identified through the ethical trade initiative in South Africa," Ehrenreich told [www.freshfruitportal.com](http://www.freshfruitportal.com).

"[Boycotted companies] will be identified as early as next week. There is an audit being done of those who are complying and those who are not and that audit will be revealed next week."

Cosatu affiliate, the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), made a more apprehensive public statement, saying, "it is too early to invoke the call for blanket boycott of all the wines, table grapes and other fruits as well as agricultural products at this stage even if this remains an option to pursue at the right time."

Cape Chamber of Commerce labor analyst Michael Bagraim warned against the implications of the call by Cosatu.

"A boycott will simply create opportunities for our competitors in South America, Australia and New Zealand to move in and grab our share of the market," Bagraim was quoted as saying by the *South African Press Association*.

Meanwhile, FAWU came out in support of strike action Wednesday, Jan. 9, something Cosatu had not publically done.

The call for strike centers around ongoing wages negotiations, with workers requesting a minimum wage increase from 70 rand (US\$8.15) a day to 150 rand (US\$17.46).

FAWU asked that workers "engage in peaceful strike actions and desist from engaging in violence yet to remain militant in the course of protest, picketing and other actions."

On the eve of the Jan. 9 negotiation deadline, Ehrenreich said that although strikes would once again be centralized in the Western Cape, farms across the country could be impacted.

He made biting criticisms of Agri SA, the organization that represents farmers.

"The negotiations have broken down because Agri SA, which is the organization of the farmers, is an old apartheid-style organization that doesn't really want to talk to black workers," Ehrenreich said.

"We would like to see decent wages, a proper land reform system that ensures workers have some right to land that they occupy and then an end to victimization and apartheid slave conditions on farms."

Agri SA CEO Hans van der Merwe said labor was putting pressure on the organization to step into a purely governmental process.

"What some of the labor movements want is for us to dictate to farmers to pay a higher minimum wage and there's no legal backing for us to enforce anything of that nature. What we do is urge our farmers in their circumstances to have discussions and negotiations with their workers and try as hard as possible to meet reasonable demands," van der Merwe told [www.freshfruitportal.com](http://www.freshfruitportal.com).

He encouraged farmers to speak with their workers and explain reasonable expectations, including the governmental wage statutes that will not be up for review until March.

Van der Merwe was hopeful that discussions so far had made positive strides.

"I believe the possible strike tomorrow will be much more of a low key event than what was the case last year. I believe constructive discussions have taken place on the farm level and we have provided in the meantime, input for the statutory review that will take effect later this year and a couple of research institutions also provided input," van der Merwe said.

He warned that if labor costs increase too substantially, South Africa could experience future job losses and industry stagnation.

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