


*Violence, burning packhouses and scorched fields, last year's labor unrest in South Africa's Western Cape put an emotional and financial drain on an already hard-pressed horticultural sector. Industry organization Agri SA is now demanding answers from the government over its role in the conflict.* 

Agri SA president Johannes Möller has called for an independent inquiry into the role played by government resources in the labor unrest that gripped South Africa's Western Cape from November to January.

"In the public interest (agricultural) Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson should provide detailed elucidation on the financial support that her department has given to the Black Association of the Wine and Spirits Industry (Bawsi) during the past financial year," he said.

Möller added that the public also needed to know "the extent to which such assistance had enabled Bawsi and its trade union offshoot Bawusa to play a leading role in organising the labour unrest".

"Commercial agriculture must contend with enormous challenges to maintain its competitiveness and profitability within a global market environment. Moreover, farmers have to make investment decisions amid uncertainty about land policy and an activist labour environment.

"While social justice remains a challenge which all role-players should help to address, it cannot be denied that the labour unrest and those who contributed to it have damaged confidence, which in turn has irrevocably changed the future structure and job-creating capacity of the industry."

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