

Farm workers demand dividends from black empowerment scheme

By [Joseph Chirume](#)

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On Saturday, 10 November, about 100 farm workers and their supporters marched to Endulini Fruit Farm in Patensie, Eastern Cape, to hand over a list of demands to managers. The farm is a leading fruit exporter.



Farmworker Buyelwa Kota leads her fellow workers in a march to Endulini Fruit Farm in Patensie on Saturday. They have accused the farm owner of failing to pay out workers who expect to benefit from the company's share scheme. Photo: Joseph Chirume

Among their demands was a call for higher hourly wages, as well as concerns with the company's profit sharing scheme. Joined by a large police escort, workers from Kouga, Addo and Kirkwood sang and marched several kilometres through the streets of Patensie. They then handed over a petition with 14 demands.

One of the march organisers, Msingathi Mbandana, said one of the main issues at Endulini started in 2000, when the farmer entered into a profit-sharing scheme with certain workers.

"This was conveniently done in order for the farmers to get land from government at a discount, purporting to be promoting black empowerment. They also got water rights and other benefits," he said.

Mbandana said the property acquired by the farm owner was developed into prime agricultural land. “The workers whose names he used to get that land and water rights are living in poverty. They don’t even know how much their dividends are because they are not allowed to see the company’s financial statements,” he said.

He said some workers are given R2,000 a year but after they complained recently, trust members started receiving R3,000, he said. Mbandana said workers suspected that the scheme was being mismanaged and want to hire an independent auditor to investigate.

Freddy Grootboom worked for Endulini Farm as a driver for 14 years. He left the company in 2006 for other employment prospects. He said he was one of the original 50 shareholders in the company.

“I never got anything from the start. Some people were getting a few thousand rands but when I enquired, they always told me to be patient. I left in 2006 and have since come to ask for my money on several occasions,” he said.

“I would like my shares for all those years they did not pay me. The farmer should explain to us how the dividends are calculated and paid.”

James Pentse injured his leg while working at the farm in 2010. “Endulini managers told me not to come back to the farm. I have been trying to get compensation for the injury but to no avail,” he said. “I was also a shareholder in the farm but they said my name is not in their system. How can my name vanish when in 2007 I was paid R2,000 as dividends from the same scheme?”

Pentse said he was forced to hire a lawyer to get the company to pay his wife’s scheme benefits after she died in 2016.

At the end of the march, the group handed their petition to Endulini general manager Charl Defin. Endulini was given seven days to respond.

GroundUp contacted the Endulini on Monday and was told to call Defin on Tuesday morning. On Tuesday, GroundUp was again told that Defin was not available and would return their call. Defin had not responded to calls or emailed questions by the time of publication.

This article was [originally published](#) on [GroundUp](#).

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