



SETAA

SINDICATO DA AGRICULTURA, ALIMENTAÇÃO E FLORESTAS



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NOT ONLY FARMERS ARE AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT! ...

The National Executive Secretariat of SETAA – *Sindicato da Agricultura, Alimentação e Florestas* (agriculture, food and forestry trade union), meeting today in extraordinary session, began to analyse and examine the measures to adopt before the respective authorities and employer associations, in order to alleviate the drought's effects on agriculture, forestry and livestock workers who, due to their direct impact, have already lost their jobs, as well as those who are threatened to lose them in the coming months.

The fact that, recently, the Agriculture Minister affirmed at the AR, that the present situation should not yet be classified as a “public calamity” (*vis-à-vis regulations and the classification of the degree of “public calamities”, justifying this classification, which in his opinion, have not yet been reached due to the drought’s current impacts...*), this does not preclude that it should be imperative to recognise the conditions of disaster already undergone by the agricultural sector and, consequently, by all the country, thus requiring to implement measures to alleviate the outcome of the situation.

SETAA and its affiliates, stand in solidarity with their employers in the sector, (farmers, forestry and cattle producers) who are already struck and will necessarily suffer in the immediate future --that is, during the current year-- from the drought's effects affecting the country.

Therefore, SETAA shall certainly agree with every administrative and financial measure that may compensate farmers from justified and confirmed damages suffered by them.

HOWEVER, SETAA also understands that, within agricultural, forestry and livestock production, not only farmers are affected by the drought...

As an outgrowth of the drought, labour offer is being hugely reduced and will increasingly decline for those contracted workers represented by SETAA in our country, either directly in the fields or, indirectly, in certain agro-food and agribusiness sectors, immediately related to them

After analysing available data, the National Executive Secretariat estimates that, at present over 50,000 jobs are already in danger and, if these conditions prevail, even crops which still have irrigation systems will be wholly lost due to the almost total depletion of water reserves and ground water, the lack of operative conditions of irrigation ditches and others, thus increasing and surely duplicating the above estimated figure and the corresponding impact at harvest time.

The workers' conditions are getting worse owing to the large and oppressive majority of agricultural tasks, due to their seasonal and rural nature. Employer organisations take advantage of these characteristics to privilege the deregulation of working conditions, with the lack of legal social security deductions corresponding to the days worked, despite SETAA's permanent demands and warnings throughout the years vis-à-vis administrative officials and the employers' structures themselves.

Thus, as a result of this illegal practice which is increasingly applied in rural labour, workers who are not able to work due to the drought **FIND THEMSELVES LEGALLY BARRED FROM HAVING ACCESS TO SOCIAL MECHANISMS PROTECTING UNEMPLOYMENT IN EFFECT IN PORTUGAL**, whose consequences are easily supposed.

In these circumstances, the meeting of SETAA's National Executive Secretariat on 5 May called on the Government and Agricultural Employer organisations to implement definite measures which may at least alleviate the high economic and social hazards also to be imposed by the drought to rural workers.

Among them, SETAA's National Executive Secretariat highlights:

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□ IMMEDIATE MEASURES:

- ✓ **The creation of a legislative decree** preventing the dismissal of workers, as an outcome of the drought, by farmers who benefit from national and/or community support, received by them as a result of all assistance measures to farmers, applied by the Government, in the context of the current situation;
- ✓ **The establishment of a social clause** in the contracts of any financial aid or support system for farmers affected by the drought, imposing that at least 45% of aid values be assigned exclusively to the preservation and to jobs in agriculture enterprises receiving such aid;
- ✓ **The creation of a special system** of social support to unemployment, out of the Labour and Agriculture Ministries' joint decision, with a direct focus on unemployed rural workers as a consequence of the drought;
- ✓ **The creation of a special swift plan** of “Continuing Vocational Training”, designed for seasonal agricultural workers, usually active, who find themselves without work as a result of the drought;
- ✓ **The moral commitment** of all those farmers and their associate structures, which still have means or aid to minimise the drought's effects on their activity, not to proceed to dismiss nor to stop hiring workers owing to the misleading allegations concerning the current circumstances, whenever such enterprises have sufficient structural means to resist the situation and have not been affected by it.

□ SHORT-TERM MEASURES:

- ✓ **Urgent availability** of the major Farmers' Associate Structures, at national level, to find negotiating capacity and availability, with the objective to launch National Collective Contracting, with the purpose to detect in the future --by mutual agreement-- among others, innovative measures of social protection for workers in similar situations;
- ✓ **A legislative provision**, on the initiative of the Labour Ministry, aimed to create a “*registration record of seasonal working days*”, actually performed, in order to have an effective accounting of the number of seasonal working days, accomplished each year, by each worker;
- ✓ **Increased monitoring actions** jointly undertaken between the Labour Inspection and the Social Security Inspection, in the Agriculture, Forestry and Livestock sector, so as to drastically reduce the use of illegal seasonal workforce, due to the absence of workers registered in Social Security and in the remaining social obligations;
- ✓ **The creation of Publicity Campaigns**, targeting the awareness of employers and of workers themselves to put into effect these social duties and rights;

□ MEDIUM-TERM MEASURES:

- ✓ **The reduction, on the part of the Government**, of the warranty periods required for agricultural seasonal workers, (*who are over 90% of the Portuguese agriculture workforce...*) in order that, by deducting their social duties, they would have more prompt access to legal subsidies when unemployed, bearing in mind that these workers are subject to the calculation of days worked, exclusively according to the working days within the week, and not to calendar days --including weekends and holidays-- as is the case of permanent workers or of those under fixed contracts.

“... we begin to become tired of these permanent situations, so constantly repetitive...” says Jorge Santos, SETAA's General Secretary, upon leaving the meeting he presided and where this release was approved.

And he added: *“... many of the issues discussed today were already the subject of SETAA's proposals to previous Governments and they are always very welcomed by them, except that, subsequently, due to the most varied reasons, excuses or arguments, they are cast into “oblivion”... and fail to be implemented! ... The Concerted Strategy Agreement itself, signed in 20 December 1996, by the 3 Employers Confederations, by UGT and by the Government, contains precise and objective deliberations on some of these topics, but, neither the signatory Government, nor its successors, transformed them into legislation as complied...”*