



FAWU MOURNS THE TRAGIC DEATH OF TWO DAIRY WORKERS FOUND IN A MILK COOLING TANK IN HUMANSDORP

The Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) is deeply shocked, saddened and angered by the tragic death of two dairy farm workers whose bodies were discovered in a milk cooling tank on a dairy farm in Humansdorp, Eastern Cape.

According to reports, the two workers, aged 27 and 54, were found face down in water within the tank during a joint recovery operation involving the South African Police Service Search and Rescue Unit, Humansdorp EMS, EMS Training and the Humansdorp Fire Rescue Unit. Both were declared dead at the scene.

FAWU extends its heartfelt condolences to the families, loved ones, friends and fellow workers of the deceased. No worker should leave home to earn a living and return home in a coffin. This tragedy is a painful reminder of the dangerous conditions many farm and food-sector workers still face every day, while their labour feeds the country and sustains profitable industries.

FAWU welcomes the opening of an inquest docket, but we strongly believe that a full and urgent investigation must go beyond merely establishing the immediate cause of death. The investigation must determine whether all occupational health and safety laws were complied with, whether proper risk assessments were conducted, whether workers were trained for confined-space work, and whether the employer had adequate safety procedures, supervision and emergency response systems in place.

A milk-cooling tank is a confined, hazardous working environment. Such spaces can expose workers to drowning risks, oxygen deficiency, toxic gases, slippery surfaces, mechanical hazards and restricted movement. Employers have a legal and moral duty to ensure that no worker enters such an environment without proper safety controls, permits, protective equipment, supervision and rescue measures.

FAWU calls on the Department of Employment and Labour to immediately conduct a thorough workplace inspection and investigation into this incident. The employer must be held fully accountable if negligence, unsafe working conditions, inadequate training, or non-compliance with occupational health and safety regulations contributed to the deaths of these workers.

We further call for:

1. A full investigation by the Department of Employment and Labour into the circumstances surrounding the deaths.
2. A police investigation without delay or cover-up to establish whether any criminal negligence occurred.
3. The release of a clear report to the families and affected workers once investigations are concluded.
4. Immediate support and compensation for the families of the deceased workers.
5. A full safety audit of the dairy farm and similar workplaces to prevent further loss of life.
6. Stronger enforcement of occupational health and safety laws in the agriculture, dairy and food-production sectors.

FAWU is concerned that farm and food-sector workers are often treated as disposable labour. They work in dangerous environments, often under poor conditions, while employers prioritise production and profit over human life. This must end.

The deaths of these two workers must not be treated as an unfortunate accident and then forgotten. They must serve as a turning point for stricter workplace safety enforcement in the dairy sector and across the entire food value chain.

FAWU will continue to monitor this matter closely and engage with the relevant authorities to ensure justice for the deceased workers and their families.

We also call on workers in the dairy and food sector to report unsafe working conditions and to refuse dangerous work that puts their lives at risk.

Workers are not machines. Workers are human beings with families, dignity and rights.

FAWU says: one worker death is one too many.

Issued by:

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