

MEDIA STATEMENT

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FAWU JOINS THE FIGHT TO SAVE TULBAGH CANNING FACILITY: WE WILL NOT ALLOW CORPORATE GREED TO ERASE OUR HISTORY AND CRUSH RURAL LIVELIHOODS

The Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU) officially joins our sister unions, local farmers, and the broader Witzenberg community in fiercely opposing Premier Foods' reckless and illegal attempt to shut down the Fruit Products Western Cape canning facility in Tulbagh.

We demand an immediate halt to the ongoing Section 189 retrenchment process. Premier Foods must immediately stop all closure plans to ensure that the critical November stone fruit harvest is not compromised.

Protecting the November Harvest Is An Emergency Priority

The proposed closure is a calculated act of economic sabotage against rural workers and local growers. If this facility closes its doors ahead of the November harvest, up to 60,000 tonnes of fruit will rot in the fields. Local farmers—who have already invested up to 60% of their annual production costs—will face total ruin.

Thousands of seasonal and permanent workers depend entirely on the upcoming harvest season to feed their families. Forcing a shutdown right now will plunge the entire Western Cape agricultural economy into a permanent depression. Premier Foods cannot be allowed to walk away and leave an entire region stranded.

Deep Historical Direct Connection to Our Roots

This battle is deeply personal for FAWU. The Tulbagh canning facility and its resilient workforce are woven directly into the foundational fabric of our union's history. This very factory was among the first historic sites to be organized under the brave banner of our predecessor, the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU), led by iconic stalwarts like Ray Alexander.

For decades, the workers of Tulbagh stood at the absolute forefront of the liberation struggle, fighting against brutal exploitation to secure the basic worker rights we defend today. We will not sit idly by while a multi-billion-rand corporate entity erases this rich legacy of struggle for the sake of short-term shareholder dividends.

Defying the Law and Corporate Accountability

FAWU strongly welcomes the ongoing investigation by the Competition Commission. The approval of Premier Foods' R5.7-billion acquisition of RFG Holdings just months ago was strictly bound to a three-year moratorium on retrenchments which is what exacerbates the shock for workers and the broader community. If the company were to be found to bypass this legal commitment by shutting down an entire plant, it is a blatant, bad-faith violation of the public interest and of workers' trust in the company management.

While Premier Foods executives pocket multimillion-rand payouts, they declare this historic plant "economically unsustainable." We reject this corporate narrative entirely.

Our Immediate Demands:

- An immediate freeze on the Section 189 consultation process.
- A guaranteed operational mandate to keep the Tulbagh facility fully running through the upcoming November harvest.
- No dismantling of physical machinery at the plant.
- The urgent convening of an emergency stakeholder summit involving the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), local grower cooperatives, and unions to structure a sustainable rescue model.

We call on all our members, community organizations, and progressive forces to mobilize. We successfully saved the Ashton facility from a similar corporate retreat, and we will use that exact same blueprint of resistance to save Tulbagh. The factory belongs to the workers and the community that built it!

An Injury to One is an Injury to All!

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