

Group threatens farmer

Protesters demand that farmer dismisses all his Zimbabwean employees

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A FARMING operation in the Donnybrook area, which pays out R2 million in monthly salaries, has had to turn to court to keep its doors open.

This follows protests allegedly sparked by the fact that the farms employ six Zimbabweans on their workforce.

Emerald Dale Farms and Patula Sawmill yesterday obtained an urgent temporary interdict in the Pietermaritzburg high court.

It prevents employees, former employees and anyone else from gathering or organising protests at any of the farms or public roads allowing access to and from the farms.

The "trouble-causers" have also been ordered not to burn tyres, logs, trees, plantations, building structures or any substance on the farms.

The application was brought on an urgent basis by advocate Chris Snyman, SC, before Judge Piet Koen following protest action that worsened at the farm this week.

Trees were set alight and farm workers were prevented from going to work, farm owner

“I was notified by my dairy manager that my dairy staff had been intimidated and fled. I therefore do not have people to milk the cows ...”

Maxwell Anderson said in court papers.

The protesters are unhappy that the farm has employed six Zimbabweans and are demanding they be fired, he said.

Anderson and his sons farm cattle, have a dairy, a sawmill and plantations. They employ between 350 and 380 people.

Last week Anderson said, he was called to a meeting on the farm attended by mostly ex-employees and unemployed individuals.

He was told by them "in no uncertain



This week 'troublemakers' blocked the main road to a farm in Donnybrook, disrupting farming operations and preventing workers from going to work.

terms" to dismiss all his Zimbabwean employees, otherwise there would be trouble on April 8.

He did not.

On Monday the protesters blocked the road to the farm with burning tyres. This prevented the mill and plantation staff from coming to work.

A meeting was arranged about this by the police, which was attended by the local inkosi, two izinduna and four ex-employees who had been dismissed for various reasons including assault and theft.

Anderson said he promised that he would not employ more Zimbabweans.

There was, however, no compromise and the attitude was simply that "we as the Andersons must leave the farm or the Zimbabweans must leave".

"I was notified by my dairy manager that my dairy staff had been intimidated and fled. I therefore do not have people to milk the cows and we are milking 1 500 cows twice daily ... so the dairy basically came to a standstill with great loss of income," the farmer said.

The unproductive and ineffective dairy can lead to an epidemic disease of the dairy cattle, known as mastitis.

The disease partly destroys the milk producing tissue and this reduces the cows' milk production. Often, mastitis-infected cows must be culled, said Anderson.

He added that an inkosi later met with the crowd who reiterated they were not prepared to compromise.

Anderson then suggested he would ask the Zimbabweans to leave over the next 12 months, once he has replaced them and found new positions for them.

This offer was also rejected.

On Tuesday, he said staff members told him and his family that they must leave the farm for their own safety because the "unknown locals threatened to remove them by force from the farm".

The troublemakers then started to set the plantations alight. Luckily, because the plantations were wet with rain, they did not burn.

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