

COMPANY TO AID SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Rainbow pledges R1m for retrenched workers

Thami Magubane

THE Food and Allied Workers' Union believes that the cutting of jobs by chicken producer Rainbow Chicken is unlikely to occur again on such a scale in KwaZulu-Natal.

Several hundred full-time workers and hundreds more casual workers have been retrenched by Rainbow Chicken this month.

The company has pledged R1 million towards skills development for some of its retrenched workers, it was announced yesterday.

A few hundred workers who had formerly been employed at the Rainbow Chicken operations in Hammarsdale, outside Durban, gathered at the local community hall where the announcement was made.

It was previously reported that the company is selling 15 of its 25 farms in Hammarsdale to stay afloat after years of fighting the impact on their industry of overseas chicken imports.

About 1 200 workers have been

retrenched in total as the company, one of South Africa's biggest chicken producers, buckles under the strain of cheap imports, mainly from Brazil and the EU.

Rainbow's HR manager, Barney Khumalo, said: "Through the agreement they had with the union, the company had pledged to give R500 000 towards a skills development fund to assist those being retrenched."

When community members asked for more, managing director Scott Pitman committed another R500 000 towards the fund, making it R1 million in total.

Khumalo said the company found itself in a difficult position, echoing the words of Pitman, who had earlier told the crowds that it was difficult to see a company like Rainbow breaking up instead of growing.

Khumalo said Rainbow was an integral part of the Hammarsdale community. "Most of the workers who are being affected are casual workers."

Khumalo said their management was engaging with the national government to stop more job

losses. "The ideal situation would be to find a way to stop the job losses, but if the situation continues like this, companies might have to continue evaluating their operations," he said.

Sidwell Mkhize, the provincial secretary of Cosatu, said the job losses were hurting families.

"With the 1 000 jobs lost here, it means that 5 000 people are going to suffer," he said.

He turned his attention to labour brokers, saying while they were not fighting labour brokers, labour brokering was something they wanted to come to an end.

"We want the workers to be employed by companies so they can receive all the benefits like medical aid."

KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Agriculture Themba Mthembu said the retrenchments were unfortunate.

"It is the price any country is paying for being integrated into the global market. We will do everything in our power to assist those who have been affected."

He said negotiations were being put in place by the province and the national government.



Hammarsdale community members react as they listen to speakers at a meeting in the community hall yesterday to discuss retrenchments at Rainbow Chicken.

PICTURE: DOCTOR NGCOBO