

High HIV rate among female farm workers

According to a recent study conducted by the International Organisation on Migration from March to May last year, almost half of the women working on farms around Limpopo and Mpumalanga are HIV positive, compared to only a third of the male workforce.

The study focused on 23 farms in Malelane, Tzaneen and Musina and found that 39,5% of the farming workforce who anonymously gave blood specimens for testing, are HIV positive.

“Women account for almost half,” says Mark Colvin, who lead the research. “The 39,5% infection rate on these 23 farms is twice the UNAids (the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids) national prevalence percentage of 18,1% in South Africa.” This is also the highest HIV prevalence ever reported among a working population.

Colvin ascribes the cause of the infection rate to a multitude of factors such as multiple and concurrent partnerships, transactional sex, irregular condom use, presence of sexually transmitted infections and sexual violence, but says that they cannot pin-point a single factor causing this high rate of HIV infection on these farms. – News24

Another farm attacked

The grandmother of a Walkerville dairy-farmer, Marie Weilbach, 79, was bashed into a coma with steel pipes by farm workers Mhlushwa Khoza and Mbongiseni Hornsby in a fit of rage after they failed to get their Christmas bonuses on time.

She's on life-support in a Gauteng hospital, with no hope for her recovery as she was declared brain-dead.

The two workers were later shot and killed when they allegedly ambushed and tried to attack Weilbach's grandson, who is the dairy foreman on the farm.

– www.praag.co.uk

Competition Commission rejects Grain SA proposal

The South African antitrust authority rejected a request by farmers to form an export pool to sell excess maize abroad in an effort to strengthen local prices after they produced the largest crop since 1982. Favourable weather and wider use of genetically modified seed have resulted in bumper harvests, boosting South Africa's crop 6,3% to 12,82 million tonnes, the highest in almost 30 years, and giving a surplus of about 4,5 million tonnes, according to a November 9 government estimate. Local crops consist of mainly white maize catering for this country's staple diet of maize.

According to a statement issued by the Competition Commission, approval of the plan would have increased the price of maize, when “under normal conditions” it would have meant lower prices for consumers. It would also have kept the price of products such as animal feed “artificially high”.

"It is bad news for producers," said Kobus Laubscher, general manager of Grain SA, South Africa's biggest farmers' group. "At the current maize price, many producers are struggling to keep their heads above water."

The application to the Competition Commission was part of a plan by Grain SA to remove the surplus from the market and to lift prices for the grain. According to the organisation, low prices will now discourage or prevent farmers from planting crops. – *Bloomberg*

North West farm worker electrocuted

A 43-year-old farm worker has died from an apparent electric shock on a North West farm. An inquest into the death of Joseph Segone was opened after he was found dead near an electric box, with both his hands holding a wire, North West police spokesperson Sabata Mokgwabone said. "This wire was also connected to iron rods situated near the electric box.

"He may have died on Saturday and been found the next morning, but this is being investigated," Sabata said. Police are also investigating what the worker was trying to do with the rods. "At this stage, we really do not know what he was doing with the rods and the electricity box, or if there was any foul play."

Meanwhile, the Congress of SA Trade Unions in the North West demanded that the labour department and police speed up investigations. "Farm workers are the most vulnerable workers by far in the country," according to Cosatu North West secretary, Solly Phetoe.

"They do not enjoy a single legislation in the Constitution." He added that Cosatu has always raised concerns about farm workers "doing this type of work without protective clothing" and being asked "to do work that they were hardly trained for". – *News24*

Agri SA backs black farmers

Agri SA supports black South Africans' purchases of land for farming, according to the organisation's deputy president, Theo de Jager, who estimates that there are about 700 black emerging commercial farmers around the country.

There is however currently no system of determining how much land is in the hands of black or white farmers, he said at a meeting held in Pretoria where Agri SA discussed transformation, rural safety and security and water pollution. A database is being developed to help in this regard.

Johannes Möller, Agri SA president, added: "We want South African farmers to participate in rural development in Africa and ensure that the country plays a role in the economy of continent."

In his view, South African food meets world-class standards. It is therefore important to develop programmes to mitigate water and land pollution, which are threatening food security. – *The Good News* [UM](#)