



Rights for Working Women JOLENE, SOUTH AFRICAN MOTHER: LONG WORKDAYS, UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS TAKE ACTION NOW

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Jolene, South African Mother: Long workdays, unsafe working conditions

THIS STORY IS PART OF ILRF'S MOTHERS' STORIES SERIES. EVERY DAY BEFORE MOTHER'S DAY, A WORKING MOTHER AROUND THE WORLD WILL BE HIGHLIGHTED. To read other stories, click [here](#).

My name is Jolene, I am 39 years old and I have 3 children. I work on a farm, which is located in the Elgin farming community in Grabouw, Western Cape, South Africa. I operate a machine on a dried fruit production line. I've worked here for 25 years. I started working to help my parents with their expenses. This is the reason why I left school. I get paid R95.60 per day (\$10 USD), about R956.00 (\$100 USD) a fortnight which results in about R1 912.00 per month (\$211 USD). I think I get paid minimum wage because my wage is not based on production or piecework, but I'm really not sure. The managers don't explain these things to us.

Men get paid far less than us, because they do less work. We work with machines, and we work all day, whereas the men finish between 11:00am and 12:00am. I work very long hours. I start at 7:30am and finish at 5:30pm. I work all year, from January to December. On an average day, I get up at 5:00am, then I start to clean the house, get the children ready, make breakfast, make sure they've all eaten, and that they're ready to go, then I go to work. When work is over I come back home and start to cook the food, then I wash the children, make tomorrow's lunch and then I can go to sleep. The next morning it starts all over again.

My salary is far less than my monthly expenses and I struggle to make ends meet. We get sick leave, and maternity leave – but we only get 3 months leave for 'maternity leave'. The kind of work we do is tedious and strenuous. We've asked the farmers to reconsider our salaries. That's when they promise us that they will reconsider and come back to us, but they never do. The women stuck in there jobs don't seem to mind or get too worried about it. There are 16 women that work with me, and we work all year round. It's unfortunate that we get such little compensation for the amount of work done. We are constantly threatened by the farmers who fire those that stand up against the unfair pay. The farmers sometimes say they can't pay out increases and if concerns continue to be voiced they then tell us that they'll just close the farm.

There are various practices that seem unsafe and unhealthy at work. One of my safety concerns is that to achieve the roundness of the dried apple rings after they leave the machine; they are currently being cut by hand. If we had machines that could do all the cutting, people wouldn't be cutting themselves and exposing their bodies to various infections. Another example is that some of the women work without shoes and they're always standing. You wouldn't believe how many of my colleagues complain about their backs. One of the two things I'd like to change at work is that the apples (to make the dried apple rings) are not cut by hand. If we could have a machine that does that, then we'd be able to work efficiently, effectively and we'd reduce the amount of injuries experienced on this farm. The second thing I'd like to change is the rule that prohibits women from wearing shoes in the workplace. Our feet are always covered by water, it's unhygienic, and standing all day hurts my back.

Jolene is active with an organization in South Africa called REACH. ILRF has worked on many projects with REACH over the years. The Rural Education, Awareness and Community Health (REACH) is a Non-Profit and Public Benefit Organization that seeks to sensitize rural farming countries, and other relevant stakeholders in the Western Cape, on the issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence, through the implementation of programs that encourage ethical, social, personal awareness and development. REACH seeks to educate and empower women to improve their rights and, in turn, contribute to the eradication of sexual harassment and sexual violence. More information about REACH is available at <http://www.laborrights.org/rights-for-working-women/partner-spotlight/reach-in-south-africa>.

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