



Response to Tom Heinemann's Documentary entitled Bitter Grapes – Slavery in the Vineyards – aired on Swedish Broadcast Television - 19 October 2016

Twenty years into our new democracy, South Africa still faces many serious economic and developmental challenges. Unemployment and seasonal employment, lack of available government subsidised housing, and low wages resulting from poor European market related prices - which drive wine profitability down to mere subsistence level on many farms - are but some of the pervasive conditions under which farming communities survive. Despite these challenges WIETA, together with trade unions, NGOs working in wine, wine producer organisations and wine brands have worked to build capacity, educate, and monitor the conditions of farm workers in wine supply chains. Many wine brands have adopted a proactive programme of continuous improvement in the employment and living conditions of farm workers over the last five years and will continue to create better working environments going forward.

Tom Heinemann's documentary on the harsh conditions of farm workers selectively reveal conditions on a few farms. This reflects a very narrow narrative of the progress that the wine industry had made in promoting and respecting farm worker rights. The documentary has clearly been commissioned to be provocative and to create sensationalism. This form of media activism has unfortunately created a distortion of the work of WIETA and the progress that has been made in improving employment conditions and addressing critical ethical issues such as human rights, housing scarcity and the right to decent work and a fair wage in the industry.

Despite attempts to criticise and discredit WIETA, we remain steadfast in ensuring that fundamental changes continue to take place for farm workers in the wine industry. Safe spaces for workers to raise their concerns around unfair treatment will need to be guaranteed going forward. WIETA will continue to ensure that a transformative agenda

seeking to uplift the lives of farm workers and to restore their dignity remains central to our work.

Our certification and Fair Labour Seal criteria is currently under review. Farms' and cellars' audit frequencies differ from 1 to 3 year cycles depending on their risk performance in the audit. Failure to comply with critical labour and human rights requirements does result on ongoing and annual monitoring and remedial action. This risk will certainly impact certification status going forward.

Whilst auditing will remain a key monitoring tool for WIETA, WIETA believes that auditing can only provide a snapshot of labour conditions taken at a particular point in time on a site. Often circumstances change in workplaces, sometimes resulting in totally unacceptable and abhorrent treatment of workers. These documented incidences will be investigated as code violations are taken very seriously.

WIETA is involved in ongoing discussions with trade unions, civil society organisations and workers to follow up on worker complaints of unfair treatment or rights-based violations. These are investigated and where violations occur, remedial action is required by the sites. We encourage the use of our toll free telephone number which workers use to inform us of any complaints. Recent conversations with farm workers has highlighted the need to look at alternative worker reporting and feedback mechanisms beyond the audit framework. We will be implementing a mobile based application that would allow workers, at no cost to themselves, to report back on a quarterly basis on key human and labour rights areas.

Wieta is not immune from criticism. And whilst we cannot but welcome any criticism and acknowledge the role such could play in our development, this criticism should be well informed. Because ill-informed criticism, can easily steer us down a destructive path and derail our efforts to support equitable socio- economic growth and sustainability for workers and employers in the wine industry.

20 October 2016

Linda Lipparoni – CEO WIETA

Email : linda@wieta.org.za

Website: www.wieta.org.za