



WEEKLY LABOUR BULLETIN

Commercial Farmers Union Bulletin #1



6th February 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	Unpacking the National Employment Council (NEC) for Agriculture in Zimbabwe.....	1
02	What is the NEC for Agriculture?.....	1
03	Proportional Representation.....	2
	Employer Organisations.....	2
	Trade Unions.....	3
04	Sub-Sectors.....	3
05	Branches.....	3
06	Importance of the NEC.....	4
07	Conclusion.....	4

CFU WEEKLY LABOUR BULLETIN -

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UNPACKING THE NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (NEC) FOR AGRICULTURE IN ZIMBABWE

The National Employment Council (NEC) for Agriculture is an organisation which plays a central role in regulating employment relations within Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. It is therefore crucial to understand how it is structured, how it operates, and whose interests it represents which is something that is critical for both employers and employees.

WHAT IS THE NEC FOR AGRICULTURE?

The NEC for Agriculture is a statutory body established under section 56 of the Labour Act [Chapter 28:01]. It exists to regulate conditions of employment in the agricultural industry through collective bargaining and standard setting. The NEC was established in 1991 for the purpose of advancing social justice and democracy in the Agriculture Industry

The NEC is composed of employer and employee representatives in equal numbers, ensuring balanced decision-making. It operates through the Council, which is the highest decision-making body of the NEC, Standing Committees, which are delegated specific duties and powers by the Council, and a Secretariat, which is responsible for administration and enforcement.

• Council – It consists of 28 selected representatives, 14 being for employers and 14 for employees (Trade Unions), which includes the Chairman and the Vice Chairman. The Chairmanship rotates between the employers and employees every 5 years, and if the chairman is from the employers, then the vice chairman must be from the employees and vice versa, (section 58 (c) of the Labour Act).

- Standing Committees – There are various committees that are at the NEC which are appointed by the Council as it deems fit, and they delegate them duties and powers.
- Secretariat – This is responsible for the day-to-day running of the NEC and is headed by the Chief Executive Officer. Designated Agents fall under this category at the NEC.

The role and responsibility of the NEC include negotiation of minimum wages and conditions of service and provides policy guidance. The Designated Agents (DAs) at the NEC resolve labour disputes at industry level and promote and monitor compliance with agreed standards and collective bargaining agreements.



CFU WEEKLY LABOUR BULLETIN -

6th February 2026



To enable the NEC to function, parties to the NEC, that is, the employers and employees must remit NEC dues every month (See section 58 (d) of the Labour Act). The dues currently sit at 3%, 1.5% from the employee, and 1.5% from the employer. The NEC dues fund wage negotiations and any other collective bargaining, dispute resolution service through conciliation and hearings, and compliance support whereby DAs go to the farms to assess compliance, educate farmers and employees on NEC CBAs as most disputes arise due to ignorance of the provisions within those CBAs and the Labour Act.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

According to section 56 (5) of the Labour Act, representation within the NEC reflects the membership strength of registered employer organisations and trade unions in the agricultural sector. This ensures fairness, inclusivity, and balanced participation in decision-making.

Representation entails voting rights at the NEC, hence, according to section 56 (5) (a) of the Labour Act, allocation of seats at the Council is allocated proportionately according to the number of members (employees) of the employer member. The more members you have, the more seats you may be allocated. This applies to Trade Unions as well, and this allocation of seats must be done every year. Below are the employer organisations and Trade Unions currently admitted at the NEC:

Employer Organisations

- Commercial Farmers Union (CFU).
- Zimbabwe Tobacco Association (ZTA)
- Zimbabwe Agriculture Employers Organisation (ZAEQ)
- Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers Union (ZCFU)
- Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU)
- Zimbabwe Sugarcane Employers Organisation (ZSEO)
- Timber Producers Association (TPA)
- Zimbabwe Tea Growers Association (ZTGA)
- Zimbabwe Indigenous Agriculture Association (ZIAA)
- Zimbabwe Kapenta Producers Association (ZKPA)
- Zimbabwe Agriculture Agro Dealers Employers Organisation
- Horticulture Employers



CFU WEEKLY LABOUR BULLETIN -

6th February 2026



Trade Unions

- General Agriculture and Plantations Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ).
- Horticulture General Agriculture and Plantations Workers Union of Zimbabwe (HGAPWUZ).
- Agriculture and Allied Workers Union (AAWU)
- Kapenta Workers Union of Zimbabwe (KWUZ)
- Zimbabwe Horticulture Agro Industries and General Agriculture Workers Union (ZHAGAWU)
- Progressive Agriculture and Allied Industries Workers Union of Zimbabwe (PAAWUZ).

It is possible for other employer organisations and Trade Unions to join the NEC after following the proper laid out procedure.

SUB-SECTORS

Because of the size of the agriculture industry, it has been broken down into the current 7 sub-sectors, namely:

- General Agriculture
- Horticulture
- Agro
- Timber
- Kapenta
- Sugarcane
- Tea and Coffee

Each sub-sector has a negotiating committee which meets to review wages and allowances, and any agreement reached will then be applied to that sub-sector. The agreements reached are binding even to those that are not part of the NEC. If no agreement is reached at this level, the matter will then be referred to Council for further management and resolution.

BRANCHES

NEC for agriculture has many branches across the country, and the following are the locations of the branches, Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare, Marondera, Chinhoyi, Chiredzi, Bindura, Rusape and Karoi.



CFU WEEKLY LABOUR BULLETIN -

6th February 2026



IMPORTANCE OF NEC

The NEC promotes industrial harmony, fair labour standards, and protects the interests of both employers and employees across the agricultural industry. The same way an employee can approach the NEC is the same way a farmer/employer can approach the NEC for assistance.

The role of the NEC through Designated Agents is to ensure that the rights of either party are protected not just one side as the NEC is a bipartite organisation, and has 50% employees and 50% employers so that it prevents one-sided decision-making.

CONCLUSION

The NEC for Agriculture is a cornerstone of labour regulation in Zimbabwe and plays a vital role in ensuring lawful, fair, and stable employment practices within the agriculture sector.

Disclaimer: This article is issued to serve as a general guide to farmers and does not substitute legal advice that may be required to address a particular situation with peculiar circumstances.

