



# WEEKLY LABOUR BULLETIN

**Commercial Farmers Union Bulletin #16**



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## GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES IN THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

### INTRODUCTION

Disputes and complaints are an inevitable part of any workplace. On farms, grievances may arise from a variety of workplace issues, and if not addressed appropriately, minor concerns can quickly escalate into serious labour disputes. It is therefore essential for farmers to establish and implement a clear grievance procedure that ensures employee concerns are addressed fairly, professionally, and in accordance with the law. Guidance on the handling of grievances is provided in Section 6 of the Code of Conduct contained in the Seventh Schedule of S.I. 41 of 2022.

### WHAT IS A GRIEVANCE?

A grievance is a complaint, concern, or expression of dissatisfaction raised by an employee regarding a workplace-related matter. It is important to distinguish a grievance from misconduct. While a grievance relates to concerns raised by an employee, misconduct involves inappropriate or unacceptable conduct by an employee that may warrant disciplinary action.

### WHY A GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE IS IMPORTANT

In any working environment, disagreements, misunderstandings, and complaints are likely to occur from time to time. The key to maintaining positive workplace relations is ensuring that such issues are addressed promptly and resolved amicably. A well-defined grievance procedure provides a structured process for managing employee concerns and helps foster a fair and harmonious working environment.

Having an effective grievance handling procedure on the farm can:

- Facilitate the early resolution of workplace issues before they escalate.
- Reduce tension and conflict within the workplace.
- Promote open communication, fairness, and mutual respect.
- Strengthen labour relations and improve employee morale.
- Contribute to increased productivity and workplace stability.

## COMMON GRIEVANCES ON FARMS

Common grievances that arise include, but are not limited to:

- Wage queries.
- Overtime complaints.
- Housing complaints.
- Supervisor conduct
- Safety and PPE concerns.
- Sanitation and welfare issues.
- Leave days
- Working conditions
- Interpersonal conflict

## THE NEED FOR A CLEAR PROCEDURE

Every farm should establish a clear and structured grievance-handling procedure, as outlined in Section 6 of the Code of Conduct, which promotes fair investigation and the timely resolution of workplace concerns. Employees must be informed of the correct channels through which to submit complaints, and it is essential that they are not subjected to any form of victimisation for raising legitimate grievances. Any form of retaliation may aggravate workplace tensions and could lead to further disputes or allegations of unfair labour practices.

## HOW A GRIEVANCE SHOULD BE HANDLED

Section 6 stated above gives a detailed way of how the grievance raised should be handled whose steps may be summarised as follows:

- Receive and record the complaint.
- Investigate the matter objectively.
- Attempt a fair resolution within 4 days
- Communicate the outcome clearly to the employee.
- If it is not resolved within 4 days, the employee may report the matter to the Grievance Committee (G.C), which is constituted according to section 9 of the Code of Conduct.
- The Grievance Committee must investigate the matter objectively.
- Conduct a hearing
- Within 15 days of receiving the grievance, the G.C must submit a report to the aggrieved employee and the employer.
- Within 3 days of receiving the report, the employer shall determine the recommendations from the G.C and then inform the aggrieved employee of the actions adopted by the employer.

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- The G.C recommendations adopted by the employer shall be binding.

It is permissible for the employee to be represented during the grievance procedure by a fellow employee, a workers committee member, a Trade Union Official or a legal practitioner at their own expense.

### WHEN GRIEVANCES CAN BE ESCALATED

It is important to recognise that grievances which remain unresolved at the farm level may be escalated for further attention. In some cases, employees may still feel dissatisfied even after a decision has been made and implemented by the employer. In such situations, the matter may be referred to NEC Designated Agents, who will seek a formal response from the relevant parties regarding the grievance.

While escalation is an available option, early resolution within the workplace is generally preferable, as it helps save time, reduce costs, and maintain positive labour relations.

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FARMERS

To avoid and minimise grievances and their escalation, the farmer must:

- Train supervisors in conflict management.
- Encourage respectful communication at all levels of the farm, avoiding abusive language and actions.
- Keep written records.
- Address complaints promptly and consistently.
- Sometimes the grievance of the employees will be against their supervisors; therefore, the farmer should try as much as possible to keep an open-door policy so that employees are free to air their grievances to them.

### RECORD KEEPING

The importance of maintaining accurate and up-to-date records cannot be overemphasised, as it is a fundamental aspect of sound employment practice. With regard to grievances, farmers are required to keep proper documentation of all complaints raised, meetings held, investigations conducted, and the outcomes reached. Such records are essential in demonstrating fairness, transparency, and accountability in decision-making. They also serve as a useful reference for handling similar issues in the future.

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## CONCLUSION

A well-structured grievance procedure promotes fairness, effective communication, and workplace stability. When grievances are managed professionally, unnecessary conflict is reduced, and productivity is enhanced. This bulletin has provided a general overview of grievance-handling procedures; however, Section 6 of the Code of Conduct contains the detailed provisions. Farmers are therefore advised to ensure that their grievance procedures are fully aligned with the Code of Conduct in order to avoid allegations of unfair labour practices.

***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.***

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