

## Agri bargaining council 'impractical'

Cosatu is pushing for the introduction of a bargaining council to determine set wages across the farming sector.

The councils are usually empowered to negotiate and enforce collective agreements; prevent and resolve labour disputes; and make proposals to the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) on labour policies and laws.

"We can't go the route of bargaining councils in agriculture because you can't have workers earning the same wages across the country,

as the circumstances vary," said Agbiz CEO Dr John Purchase.

"The sectoral determination works well and it's important that we continue with the wage determination structure as it is at the moment."

It is also feared that introducing bargaining councils could see the sector go the same route as the textile industry, which shed 50 000 jobs in the past decade as a result of the council introducing a fixed national entry wage. A South African

Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) study revealed that the proportion of workers and employers who used bargaining councils to negotiate wages decreased marginally from 9,6% to 9,4% between 2011 and 2012.

Despite several amendments to the 1995 Labour Relations Act, which sought to promote and facilitate collective bargaining, the total number of bargaining councils has fallen from 77 in 1996 to 46 in 2012.

SAIRR researcher Jonathan Snyman said the biggest cause for

concern regarding the decline in bargaining councils was that structured wage negotiations fell by the wayside. "The rhetoric in the build-up to strikes led by unions has become very militant, with union leaders saying that workers are prepared to fight and die for higher wages. Wage negotiations done by bargaining councils are more structured and amicable."

But Snyman conceded that, because the councils have more sway when it comes to

instituting minimum wages, it could lead to many smaller farms being unable to afford labour – as was the case in the textile industry.

The study also showed that companies in the platinum sector are considering moving towards a collective bargaining system after strikes disrupted the sector in recent months.

Meanwhile, other mining sectors, such as gold and coal, which already have collective bargaining but no councils, are talking of setting these up. – *Lindi van Rooyen*