



# Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare

CASE STUDY

**Afrifresh**  
Agribusiness, South Africa

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# South Africa



**Economy name:**  
South Africa

**Main business city:**  
Johannesburg\*

**Region:**  
Sub-Saharan Africa

**Income level:**  
Upper middle  
income

**Population:**  
54,001,953

**Female population:**  
27,774,550

**Labor force  
participation (15+):**  
46% female  
61% male

**Compulsory  
primary education  
enrollment age:**  
7 years



## Leave policies

Paid maternity leave	Yes	120 days
Paid paternity leave	Yes	3 days
Paid parental leave	No	0



## Legal obligation for employers to support childcare

	0-2 years	3-5 years
Obligation for employers to support childcare?	No	No
Based on the number of female employees?	N/A	N/A
Based on the number of employees regardless of gender?	N/A	N/A
Special legislation on employer-provided childcare?	No	No



## Government incentives to employers to support childcare

Tax benefits to employers to support childcare?	No	No
Non-tax benefits to employers to support childcare? (monetary and/or nonmonetary benefits)	No	No



## Quality of private childcare services

License or registration required?	Yes	Yes
Zoning requirements?	Yes	Yes
Pupil-teacher ratio required?	Yes	Yes
Penalties for non-compliance with laws?	Yes	Yes

\* The *Women, Business and the Law* data are based on domestic laws and regulations that apply to the main business city of the economy. For more information on the methodology including the maternity/paternity/parental leave calculation methodology, visit [wbl.worldbank.org](http://wbl.worldbank.org)



# Afrifresh

## Agribusiness, **SOUTH AFRICA**

### **PARENTS, WORK, AND CHILDCARE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Women represent an important part of South Africa's labor force (World Bank, 2015a). Yet, while women are more likely than men to be enrolled in both secondary and tertiary education (UIS, 2017), they are still significantly less likely than men to be in the labor force (45 percent versus 61 percent) (2014 estimates, World Bank DataBank).

One reason for women's lower levels of labor force participation is that women are still most likely to be the primary caregivers for children in South Africa, which limits their ability to engage in paid work. National survey data indicates that South African women spend more time on caregiving activities than men: 3 hours and 15 minutes per day, compared to 1 hour and 28 minutes for men (Statistics SA, 2013). Moreover, fathers are absent from the majority of households: some 61 percent of children in South Africa do not live with their fathers (Statistics SA, 2013). High levels of HIV/AIDS (estimated at 19.2 percent) further complicate childcare responsibilities in many families (UNAIDS, 2015).

Before children start attending school, parents are primarily responsible for their care. School is compulsory for children beginning at the age of seven, but 87 percent of children participate in Grade-R beginning at age five (GHS, 2014). Around 48 percent of children up to the age of four years participate in some kind of early childhood development (ECD) facility (GHS, 2014), which are operated by the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. Children may also be cared for by privately hired childminders or nannies. Childcare can be a very high expense, especially for low-wage workers, and many children may be left unsupervised.

This case study discusses how Afrifresh,<sup>1</sup> an agribusiness company, assists working parents within its operations by providing childcare on its farms. Benefits to the company include an enhanced status as an employer of choice in its sector, improved retention rates and access to experienced workers, and greater availability of workers during busy harvesting periods.

In 2015, **women represented:**

- 35% of Afrifresh's 1,220 permanent workforce
- 48.5% of Afrifresh's 4,144 seasonal workforce

Afrifresh **supports workers with children** through:

- Workplace crèches on farms
- Transport for children to/from school
- Flexible work arrangements for professional workers

Main **business impacts** of childcare support:

- Enhanced status as an "employer of choice"
- Overtime and productivity gains
- Increased safety for workers' children living on-site
- Ongoing market access and enhanced profile with buyers

CAREGIVER AND CHILD AT ONE OF AFRIFRESH'S ON-SITE CRÈCHES.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF AFRIFRESH GROUP

## COMPANY BACKGROUND

Afrifresh is a South African producer and exporter of fresh fruit. The company specializes in table grapes and citrus (grapefruits, oranges, soft citrus, and lemons), and has buyers in more than 50 countries. It is a vertically integrated business, with activities spanning the whole agricultural value chain, incorporating farming, processing, marketing, and distribution. In 2015, the company had combined global sales of 44,978 tons of table grapes and citrus and its total turnover was 245 million South African rands (\$16 million).

Afrifresh is representative of a new generation of large-scale corporatized farming operations in South Africa, as smaller farms are being absorbed by larger producers (DAFF, 2014). Prior to 2009, the company operated as an export agent only, buying fruit from local producers and selling it to overseas buyers. In 2009, the company embarked on an ambitious strategy to expand its operations into production so it could better control the supply and quality of its fruit. The company bought several citrus and table grape farms across South Africa, many of which were “in distress” and required significant investment to renew and expand their production capacity.

At the beginning of 2016, 43 percent of the company’s crop capacity was still immature; however, it will reach full production by 2017, meaning that Afrifresh will nearly double its export volume over the next two years. The company’s expansion has had dramatic consequences for its workforce size and composition, with the number of permanent workers increasing five-fold between December 2010 and January 2011, and the profile changing to a majority of unskilled farm workers, many of whom live on-site. By the end of 2015, Afrifresh employed 1,220 permanent workers on 10 sites across South Africa, up from 151 in 2009, and 4,144 seasonal workers. Once the company’s new plantings reach full maturity, the workforce will grow even further.

This case study focuses predominantly on three Afrifresh sites: River Fresh (Western Cape, citrus and table grapes), Berekisanang (Northern Cape, citrus and table grapes), and the company’s head office (Cape Town).<sup>2</sup>

### Working Parents and Children at Berekisanang and River Fresh



## CHILDCARE NEEDS OF AFRIFRESH EMPLOYEES

Women are an important part of Afrifresh’s workforce, representing 35 percent of the permanent workforce and 48.5 percent of the seasonal workforce.<sup>3</sup> At the head office, women hold administrative and management roles, while on farms women tend to hold administration and operational roles that require high levels of attention to detail, such as vine development, picking table grapes and smaller citrus, and grading and packing fruit. Men are more likely to occupy jobs that require greater physical strength, and job roles with higher skill profiles and corresponding higher pay grades, including farm managers, supervisors, truck and tractor drivers, and machine operators.

Afrifresh provides accommodation for most of its permanent workers, including the children and extended family members of some workers. Afrifresh also provides temporary accommodation for seasonal workers. For the most part, however, seasonal workers are not accompanied by their children.

Many agricultural workers do not live with their children. Extended family networks, including grandparents, cousins, sisters, and aunts, continue to play a key role in providing childcare support. These support networks continue to be influenced by the apartheid legacy, when black Africans were based in "homelands" or pockets of land within the country. This led to many families having a rural base for the extended family, where grandparents retire, the unemployed stay, and children are cared for, while working age parents travel to find work and send money home. In this setting, children are often left in the care of extended family, although working parents may take young children with them, in which case they are looked after by caregivers at home, in community childcare facilities, or left home alone (Cawse, 2010).

Professional staff, including those at the head office in Cape Town, are also likely to rely on family networks for childcare. Finance Officer Kim Biesheuvel said that her mother helped with childcare while her child was growing up and "this kind of back-up and support was critical." Depending on income levels, professional staff may also have a paid domestic worker at home to assist with childcare and household chores.

## HOW AFRIFRESH SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES WITH CHILDCARE NEEDS

Afrifresh provides different kinds of childcare support for its farm workers and its professional, office-based staff. Workers who live on Afrifresh farms with their children have access to on-farm crèches and other support for after-school care and medical needs, while professional staff benefit more from flexible working arrangements.

### On-farm crèches

Crèches are common in the agricultural industry in some regions of South Africa (such as the Western Cape), and Afrifresh has operated crèches in these regions for a number of years. Afrifresh provides a crèche where a high proportion of workers do not originate from the local area and therefore do not have local family networks to assist with care, such as in Berekisanang in the Northern Cape.

Afrifresh operates five crèches on its farms: three at River Fresh (one of the largest production sites), one at Berekisanang, and one at Galactic Deals. These crèches cater primarily to preschool children (up to five years of age), but also provide after-school care for younger school-age children (up to around eight years of age). Places are made available

EMPLOYEES' CHILDREN WITH THEIR CAREGIVERS AT ONE OF AFRIFRESH'S ON-SITE CRÈCHES.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF AFRIFRESH GROUP

**"Women prefer to have their children on the farm if possible, because they are closer if something happens."**

**Female worker, River Fresh**

for all children who need care, and there are no waiting lists. Typically, each crèche has a common area with toys and educational materials, a sleeping area with mattresses, a kitchen with a refrigerator, and a bathroom. All crèches have an outdoor play area and some have playground equipment. Each crèche is registered with the local municipality, and oversight is provided by farm management.

The Afrifresh crèches are predominantly used by permanent farm workers who live on-site. However, at River Fresh, some female seasonal workers bring their children to live with them in separate seasonal worker accommodations set aside for women and children, and use the farm crèches. When registering a child, parents are required to sign a liability waiver that provides indemnity for Afrifresh in case of accidental injury and a consent form that permits the crèche to administer first aid to the child if necessary.

The crèches are relatively small, with two childcare workers typically looking after between five and 10 preschool-age children. The crèches at River Fresh provide care for a total of 31 children, and the crèche at Berekisanang provides care for up to 37 children. The number of children may vary throughout the year, depending on whether seasonal workers' children are enrolled. For instance, at the beginning of 2016, the Muis Paleis crèche at River Fresh had eight preschool-age children enrolled, but this figure increased to 15 in the picking season. When the number of children needing care increases, Afrifresh temporarily hires additional childcare workers.

The childcare workers in the crèches are female permanent farm workers selected from the general workforce. They receive training in first aid and general health and safety. Currently, they do not receive dedicated training in early childhood development, although Berekisanang has plans to address this when the operation enters full production and it has access to more training funds. At River Fresh, the company pays for educational books for the children to work on with the childcare workers.

The crèches provide convenient childcare for farm workers: on each farm, they are located close to housing and operate

Monday to Friday, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., providing childcare for the entire work day. In picking season, when workers need to work overtime to meet production schedules, the crèches stay open later as required. Given the proximity of the crèches to the workplace, women can easily visit during the day if there is an emergency, or to breastfeed their babies. Farm shifts are designed to take into account the needs of breastfeeding mothers.

Childcare in the crèches is provided free of charge or at low cost. At River Fresh, workers pay a small fee of 25 South African rands (\$1.60) per week. At Berekisanang, the crèche is provided free of charge. Food for children is not provided: workers provide their children's own snacks and lunches.

Women whose children are placed in the crèches value the care their children receive. "Our children are safe and taken care of here. . . The children love Anna and Elizabeth [the childcare workers] and can't wait to come to the crèche to see them. Sometimes they cry when it is time to go home because they don't want to leave them," said one mother with a child in a River Fresh crèche. Another mother commented that the teacher at the local school said her child was better prepared for starting school than others, and the mother attributed this to the attention provided by the childcare workers at the farm crèche.

At the moment, crèches are only established on those farms where they were already in place when Afrifresh bought the sites (River Fresh), or where they have been introduced in response to worker requests (Berekisanang and Galactic Deals). However, in recognition of employee needs and the

**"It's easier working here because of the crèche. If my children had to go to a crèche in town, this would be very expensive."**

**Female worker, River Fresh**

**“The little ones love going to the crèche, because they learn things there.”**

**Supervisor and grandmother of a child at one of the River Fresh crèches**

associated business benefits for the company, the company is discussing plans to introduce three more crèches on its farms in the Marble Hall area.

### **Support for school-age care**

Afrifresh also provides free transport to local schools for children who live on its farms. At River Fresh, this cost is shared with other farms in the area, who all pay a proportion of the cost on behalf of their workers. When the child of an Afrifresh worker becomes unwell at school, the farm will arrange for a driver to pick up the child and, if necessary, take the child to the local clinic.

The company also looks for ways to engage with local primary schools in rural communities. At Fruit Star, the farm invites children from a nearby school to visit, to educate children on the local fruit industry, and raise awareness of the company in the community. Afrifresh is currently exploring options to support a capacity-building program for a school near River Fresh.

### **Flexible working arrangements for professional staff**

At the head office, employees can start and finish their working day earlier, with staggered start times of 7:00, 8:00, or 9:00 a.m. This flexibility is available to all staff, but it is particularly valued by parents who need to coordinate school and/or childcare drop-offs and pick-ups. Other staff use it to avoid rush hour traffic. The company also makes an effort to provide flexibility on an ad hoc basis for working parents who are faced with emergencies, such as sick children, or

unexpected gaps in childcare. These arrangements are used by all staff, including senior managers, such as Susanne de Waal, Head of Quality Assurance and Compliance.

Part-time and flexible working arrangements are relatively rare in formal workplaces in South Africa (Cawse, 2010) and this is an area of ongoing evolution for Afrifresh. Recently, the company experimented with more flexible working arrangements for a head office employee who encountered unexpected last-minute difficulties in accessing formal care for her newborn baby. Afrifresh agreed to alternative arrangements for this worker for two months (shorter hours and some remote work from home) to allow her to return to paid work while she made more durable childcare arrangements. In trying to find the best solution, Afrifresh also discussed other options; for instance, allowing the employee to take some annual leave in advance.

It is not possible for the company to introduce home-based working arrangements for operational staff, and it is similarly more challenging to introduce staggered shift patterns for this group. However, where possible, the company endeavors to provide some flexibility in working hours for parents in this group, such as providing time to accompany sick children to the doctor.

**“We are lucky enough here to have a bit of flexibility at Afrifresh to deal with family situations. It is a privilege to have this understanding at senior management level. First I'm a human and a parent, then I fit my work responsibilities around that.”**

**Susanne de Waal, Head of Quality Assurance and Compliance**

## Leave for parents

Access to adequate leave for parents is critical for enabling workers (both mothers and fathers) to balance their paid work and childcare responsibilities. Further, maternity leave makes an important contribution to the health and well-being of mothers and their newborn babies.

Afrifresh provides all workers with a range of care-related leave, in line with national legislation (see World Bank Group, 2016):

- **Maternity leave**

Under South African law, women are entitled to 17.32 weeks (121 days) of unpaid maternity leave, provided they work more than 24 hours per month. Pay during leave is available through social insurance. All workers at Afrifresh (professional staff and farm workers) contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), and are thus eligible to apply to the Maternity Benefits Fund for payments during their maternity leave. Seasonal workers are also eligible, provided they have made 13 weeks of contributions to the UIF in the year before the expected date of childbirth. Payments are made on a sliding scale, up to a maximum of 60 percent of a workers' salary, and with a cap on payments to higher-income earners. Where possible, Afrifresh provides employees with assistance in filling out their UIF forms.

For professional staff with more than five years of service, Afrifresh tops off the UIF payment with 50 percent of the employee's salary for the duration of maternity leave.

Afrifresh employees can also negotiate further unpaid leave (beyond statutory entitlements) with their managers. However, this is seldom taken, as most women—professional staff and farm workers alike—say they cannot cover the cost of the leave themselves.

- **Family responsibility leave/paternity leave**

Each year, parents are entitled to three days of paid family responsibility leave, which they can use to care for sick children. There is no statutory entitlement to paternity leave in South Africa, but men may use family responsibility leave for this purpose.

### Maternity Return Rates at Berekisanang and River Fresh

6 **women went on maternity leave** in the last three years

6 **women returned from maternity leave in the last 3 years** and were still employed a year later

- **Sick leave**

Employees are entitled to 30 days of paid sick leave in a 36-month cycle. In line with national legislation, parents can use their sick leave for their children's illnesses as well as their own, once they have used their family responsibility leave for the year. Women also often use outstanding sick leave to extend their maternity leave.

## THE BUSINESS IMPACT OF AFRIFRESH'S CHILDCARE BENEFITS

There is no separate budget for the crèches, as the expense is considered small enough to be subsumed within other budget lines (e.g., the electricity for the crèche is paid as part of the overall farm electricity bill). The company maintains the buildings and playgrounds, pays the childcare workers' wages, and covers the costs of electricity, water, and any educational materials, such as books. At River Fresh, the company estimates that it pays approximately 10,000 South African rands (\$686) each month to operate each crèche.

### Being an “employer of choice”

Providing childcare on farms and flexible working arrangements for professional staff helps to raise Afrifresh's profile as a good employer at all levels of the organization: with managers, supervisors, and general farm workers. This applies at the head office and across all production sites.

According to Johan van Wyk, the company's HR Director, "We want to be seen as a preferred employer in the communities in which we operate. . . . This helps to attract not only workers, but also farm managers."

Crèches are a prerequisite for successful recruitment on farms, where women workers expect this service to be provided. A recent study found that more than 60 percent of permanent workers and 40 percent of seasonal workers on fruit and wine farms in the Western Cape have access to a free or subsidized crèche (Visser and Ferrer, 2015). Managers at River Fresh confirmed that it is a long-standing practice for table grape farms in the area to operate a crèche and without one, the company would be out of step with industry norms. Colette Hugo, Compliance Coordinator at River Fresh, explained, "There are around 10 to 15 large farms in the local area, all competing for the same workers. We all have to offer at least the same terms and conditions as the others . . . Offering even better-quality employment is important for being an employer of choice." Similarly, Dirk Lategan, General Farm Manager at River Fresh, observed, "We can't do without the crèche. We would miss out on seasonal labor if we didn't have it."

Flexible working arrangements can also help Afrifresh to attract and retain the best professional staff. Having flexibility in emergencies, such as dealing with sick children, as well as for the regular challenges of dropping children off at school, especially for families whose children attend different schools, is a major incentive for women with children. According to van Wyk, "We want to create a culture where people want to work for us and want to stay." Afrifresh recognizes that recruitment and retention of good staff is one of the pay-offs of its efforts to help professional women manage their childcare arrangements. With respect to the plans put in place for the new mother with unexpected childcare difficulties, Biesheuvel said, "The fact that we tried hard to accommodate her situation was motivating for her . . . I think it's more likely that she will stay with us now, because she knows that we will try to look after her."

### **Overtime and productivity**

Having a crèche on-site makes it easier for women farm workers to work overtime during picking and packing season. The company needs women to be available to work overtime during its busiest period, as they are concentrated in key functions, such as grading and packing, that are critical to achieving higher volumes of fruit. Moreover, permanent workers (the main beneficiaries of the crèches) are the most experienced workers, and more likely to occupy positions of greater responsibility (e.g., team leaders).

Farms that provide seasonal workers with access to a crèche realize clear productivity gains associated with ensuring that the company's best seasonal workers—many of whom are women—return each year for its peak season. Experienced seasonal workers can work faster and require less oversight from supervisors. High labor productivity is particularly critical for table grapes, a labor-intensive crop that needs to be picked and packed within a short time frame (six to eight weeks). The seasonal workforce is critical for making sure that this work is done within the quickest possible timeframe at the lowest possible cost.

According to Afrifresh managers, there are also general productivity benefits associated with providing childcare for

**"There are around 10 to 15 large farms in the local area, all competing for the same workers. We all have to offer at least the same terms and conditions as the others . . . Offering even better quality employment is important for being an employer of choice."**

**Colette Hugo, Compliance Coordinator,  
River Fresh**

farm workers, as workers are likely to be more productive if they know their children are being looked after. For example, Melinda Dolby, Sustainability and Compliance Coordinator, observed that, “Your mind will not be fully on your job if you don’t know how your children are being looked after.” A study of South African horticulture found that managers identified a positive link between crèche facilities and worker productivity (Barrientos and Visser, 2012).

### On-farm safety for workers’ families

Child safety is a major motivation behind the Afrifresh crèches. Adri van Niekerk, Project Coordinator at Berekisanang, noted that safety is a paramount consideration: “As a business, we need to have this: Children who are living on the farm need to be looked after.” Without proper adult supervision, children are at serious risk given the numerous hazards on farms, including chemicals, confined spaces, machinery, vehicles, and dams. This not only creates a hazard for children, but could also lead to additional costs for the company in the form of medical expenses and legal liability. As such, a crèche ensures that small children are adequately supervised while their parents are at work.

### Market access and profile with buyers

Providing better working conditions for farm workers, such as by offering childcare, can help Afrifresh raise its profile

with buyers in high-value markets. Afrifresh targets high-value export markets for its products: it sells more than 80 percent of its table grapes and 27 percent of its citrus to the United Kingdom and other European Union countries. Buyer standards in these markets are high, not only with respect to product quality and schedule, but also regarding working conditions on farms. To this end, fresh produce suppliers commonly must demonstrate compliance with international voluntary codes of conduct on labor and working conditions.

Typically, codes of conduct require suppliers to comply with international core labor standards, including protection from sex discrimination. Afrifresh follows the standard developed by the Sustainability Initiative of South Africa (SIZA), which additionally requires companies to protect workers from discrimination on the grounds of *inter alia* pregnancy, marital status, and family responsibility, and, where families are provided accommodation at or near the workplace, must physically exclude resident children from the workplace.

There is no specific requirement for companies to provide on-site crèches for workers’ children. However, by going beyond compliance with buyer codes of conduct on labor standards and aiming for best practice by providing additional services, Afrifresh can distinguish itself from other suppliers. This can provide an additional competitive edge given that some of Afrifresh’s most important buyers in high-value markets are

AN AFRIFRESH FARM WORKER.

**“If the child is happy, the mum is happy and this makes her a better worker.”**

**Dirk Lategan, General Farm Manager at River Fresh**



PHOTO: COURTESY OF AFRIFRESH GROUP

looking to consolidate their supplier base—i.e., source higher volumes from a smaller number of suppliers.

### **Investing in the future workforce**

Van Wyk said that there is a business case for investing in crèches and children's education in communities adjacent to their farms: "This is potentially the next generation of workers for us, so it makes sense to think ahead and invest in their development early on. But we also want to create opportunities for our workers' children. Not everyone wants to stay on a farm."

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **Creating space for dialogue about childcare needs**

Afrifresh emphasizes that when it comes to childcare needs, it is crucial to listen to workers, rather than assume that the company knows best. The company established the crèches at Berekisanang and Galactic Deals in response to worker demand, which was expressed in dialogue with management through elected worker committees. However, crèche facilities are not the main priority for workers on all farms. At Fruit Star, the farm received a grant to construct a building; when workers were asked what they wanted most, they voted in favor of a dedicated education center for adults, rather than a crèche. (Nevertheless, recognizing that worker needs can shift over time, the center was designed so that one part of the building could be easily converted into a crèche facility in the future.)

Plans are currently underway to introduce a crèche at Afrifresh's Rodash farm in response to worker interest, and because the company wants to avoid having children on the site with limited supervision during the working day. Similarly, the company is looking at establishing crèches at two other sites (Copper Zone and Aberlachie), based on worker requests.

For professional staff, there may be scope for further conversation about how the company could help support employee's childcare needs. Some of this may just relate to raising basic awareness of the difficulties many women face

in juggling work and family responsibilities. As one female manager described the situation, "Farming and agribusiness is a very male environment. Consequently, male managers don't always understand the challenges that women face in juggling family and work. Historically, women's participation in the industry was based on their role in the home, as farmers' wives."

Dialogue on childcare may also mean encouraging men (particularly senior managers) to use flexible working arrangements to support their own families, and provide an example to others of how men can participate in family life.

### **Thinking flexibly about cost-effective approaches**

The Afrifresh experience suggests that employer-provided childcare need not be prohibitively expensive. Working parents may make a small contribution to the operating expenses, such as at River Fresh, where workers pay a small amount each month. New crèches can be established in a cost-effective way, particularly where it is possible to convert existing rooms or buildings into crèches. For instance, at Berekisanang, Afrifresh converted one of the worker houses into a crèche, while at Galactic Deals, an unused television room was adapted to become a crèche. Converting an existing building into a farm crèche costs approximately 25,000 South African rands (\$1,700), since a lot of the equipment (including toys and books) can be sourced through donations. However, where existing spaces are adapted, care needs to be taken that spaces that were previously used for other purposes (e.g., television rooms) are appropriate for childcare and that statutory requirements (for space, sinks, and toilets) are met.

In light of the benefits to workers and the business, Afrifresh is considering how it might improve its crèche facilities. In the medium term, Berekisanang hopes to win funding to build a community center for workers who live on the farm. The center will include a purpose-built crèche, as well as a health clinic, an education center, a farm shop, and a recreation area for workers. The company is also considering whether it may be viable to cover the costs of food for children who attend the crèches.

## Experimenting with flexible working arrangements

Flexible and part-time working arrangements are less common in South Africa than in many other countries. There are no women (or men) employed on a part-time basis at Afrifresh's head office, but some of the farms offer part-time office positions. The relative absence of part-time work seems to be a combination of personal financial pressures (i.e., few women feel they can afford to work part-time), but also workplace norms (i.e., there is a lack of quality part-time work on offer). However, Biesheuvel thinks that Afrifresh employees would take up part-time work if it were available: "I think a lot of women with young children would like to work part-time, although it is difficult to implement from a management point of view, because you need more staff."

The company's recent experiment with home-based work for one new mother was unplanned, but proved to be a pivotal learning experience, demonstrating to several managers that flexible working arrangements can be put in place at relatively low cost and with little inconvenience to colleagues. Biesheuvel said, "Ultimately, it turned out well for everyone, but at the time, we had to work hard to convince some senior managers that it was possible to work from home." She noted that this could open the door for more discussions on working from home, but recognizes that it would not be appropriate in all circumstances ("Not for those who are less motivated"). Biesheuvel noted, "It's challenging to maintain the same quality of workplace relationships when you work from home. In impromptu face-to-face meetings, you can take

care of things quickly, but this is impossible when you work from home." However, she admitted that there are also major benefits: "There are productivity gains in working from home—if you have the right discipline, there are fewer distractions and no travel time."

## CONCLUSION

The crèches on Afrifresh farms are a good example of the type of childcare support that benefits low-wage workers in rural areas and provides benefits for the company, including an enhanced profile as an employer of choice in the local area, safety for children on its farms, and higher levels of employee productivity. For a reasonable cost, employers can provide childcare facilities for their worker families. Although childcare is currently more of a basic operational requirement, Afrifresh is considering further enhancing the quality of the crèche in the future to make it more of a stand-out component to further boost the company's reputation as a good employer in the region. Alongside these developments at production sites, the company is also experimenting with flexible working arrangements for professional staff.

**"Ultimately, it turned out well for everyone, but at the time, we had to work hard to convince some senior managers that it was possible to work from home . . . There are productivity gains in working from home—if you have the right discipline, there are fewer distractions and no travel time."**

**Kim Biesheuvel, Finance Officer**

## Endnotes

1. The research for this case study was carried out in 2016. Afrifresh has since changed ownership and the company is now trading as ACG Fruit.
2. Interviews for this case study were conducted in person in April 2016 in South Africa, with a cross-section of Afrifresh staff at the company's head office, and its River Fresh and Berekisanang production sites. Interviewees included managers and employees responsible for farming operations, human resource management, finance, diversity and inclusion, training and occupational health services, ethical trade and social compliance, and childcare. Interviews and focus group discussions were also held with farm supervisors and female employees at River Fresh and Berekisanang.
3. For a detailed description of how Afrifresh supports women's employment more generally, see the Afrifresh case study in IFC. 2016. *The Business Case for Women's Employment in Agribusiness*. [http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry\\_ext\\_content/ifc\\_external\\_corporate\\_site/agribusiness/resources/publication\\_women+in+agribusiness](http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/agribusiness/resources/publication_women+in+agribusiness)

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