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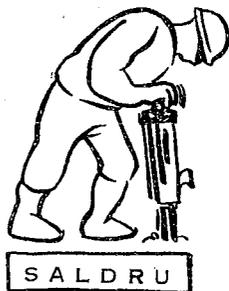
SALDRU FARM LABOUR CONFERENCE

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Paper No. 1

Farm Labour in the Cathcart District

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FARM LABOUR IN THE CATHCART DISTRICT

A personal view, with background information and statistics from a group of 7 farmers.

by  
Walter and Pam Perks

This is by no means a comprehensive survey, but it is hoped that sufficient information is given to provide some kind of picture of the present situation with respect to Farm Labour, and also of changes that have taken place over the last 30 years.

All farmers in the group concerned live in the Magisterial District of Cathcart their chief farming enterprises being sheep (wool and mutton) and beef cattle with agriculture chiefly to provide feed for stock. Rainfall varies from 550-810mm average per annum, with considerable differences from year to year - rain falling throughout the year, and snow often falling during winter in the higher rainfall area.

I. POPULATION ON THE LAND

TABLE I

Male Permanent Labourers : Average on Seven Cathcart Farms<sup>\*</sup>

	<u>1946</u>		<u>1956</u>		<u>1966</u>		<u>1976</u>	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Under 15 years	2,6	14,2	2,0	12,5	1,3	7,9	1,9	11,6
15'25 years	4,0	21,4	4,2	26,3	3,3	19,8	3,6	22,3
25/45 years	8,6	46,4	5,2	32,5	7,5	44,5	5,6	34,8
Over 45 years	3,3	17,8	4,6	28,8	4,7	27,7	5,0	31,3
Total employed	18,7 (8/32)	100	16 (9/25)	100	16,8 (11/23)	100	16 (12/23)	100
Size of farms in Hectares	-		1913		2033 (1260/2924)		2168 (1130/3010)	
Hectares per labourer	-		136		131 (109/172)		154 (100/250)	

<sup>\*</sup> In the tables presented, the group average is given, with figures in brackets being the highest and lowest respectively.

TABLE 2

## Size of Families (including labourers under 15 years)

	1966		1976	
	No	%	No	%
Pre-school	21 (12/31)	25,7	20 (14/30)	23,1
School	25 (9/38)	31,5	28 (23/38)	32,3
Teen-age	11 (4/20)	13,7	11 (2/19)	12,1
Married	12 (9/22)	15,4	14 (9/26)	15,9
Unmarried women & widows	8 (4/12)	10,0	9 (5/11)	10,0
Govt. pensioners	3 (5/0)	3,7	5 (1/11)	5,7
Total population excl. adult males	81 (45/136)	100	88 (73/103)	100
No. adult labourers	15		14	
Size of families	5,2		6,2	

All population on the land belong to the Xhosa ethnic group. A minimal number of people of Coloured descent are to be found, but they have intermarried with the Xhosa and adopted their lifestyle and are completely integrated.

## 2. TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT

All permanent employees are on a monthly basis of employment i.e. their cash wages are paid on a monthly basis, but in very rare cases is a month's notice given for a dismissal or resignation - this taking effect almost immediately as a rule.

## 3. PATTERNS OF SKILL OF ADULT MALES

Of those presently employed 42% drive tractors (but only half of these are licenced. Since the Provincial Traffic Department have taken over the testing for licences, there has been a dramatic drop in the number of licences issued per year. Figures at the last E.A.U. Congress by the Traffic Dept. showed that by the year 2000 some 400 000 tractor drivers will be needed in South Africa, but at the present rate of issuing licences, only 25 000 (i.e. 6%) will be qualified.

10% of the staff can drive trucks (of whom 45% are licenced), 43% fence, 38% can shear (by hand). Including employees under 15, 89% can milk (by hand), and 40% can read and write.

### Labour Functions

Although nearly all staff do have particular tasks e.g. tractor drivers, herds for cattle and sheep, all members of the staff are expected to do all other types of work when necessary.

Blacks in this area (belonging to the Xhosa group) prefer to do all work in gangs (never working individually on their own), but will not accept responsibility over each other i.e. no-one wants to be in charge of others, and neither will they accept one of their own number to be in charge of them. This poses one of the greatest problems in farming here. Higher wages incentives have not helped to overcome their unwillingness to accept responsibility. Linked with this unwillingness is that the workers are unreliable and unpredictable. For months, or even years, they will do a particular job correctly, as instructed, and then 'quite out of the blue' they will do the same task, in the same circumstances, and make a complete 'botch' of it, without being able to explain the reason for the change in their way of doing it. Or, a member of staff will accept responsibility for some particular task while the farmer is away on holiday e.g. checking on stock-lick in camps, but immediately the farmer returns, he will no longer accept this responsibility. All work requires constant supervision.

### 4. WAGES AND EARNINGS

TABLE 3 Wages and Earnings of Adult Labourers

Monthly	1946	1956	1966	1976
Cash (R)	2,25	3,70	5,15 (6,70/1,75)	14,20 (23,90/10,50)
Meat - Amt. Value *(R)	1/10 (1/4) 0,33 (0,75/0)	1/10, (1/4) 0,80 (2/0)	1/8 (1/4) 1,25 (2,50/0)	1/5 (1/2) 4 (10/0)
Mealies (Kg)	71 (73/60)	71 (73/60)	72 (81/60)	66 (90/0)
Milk (separated) (litres)	164 (273/136)	163 (273/136)	172 (273/136)	177 (273/136)
Whole milk (litres)				7,55 (45,5/ 0)
Other monthly rations (R)	0	0	0	2,31 (8/ 0)
* Value of 1 sheep (R)	3	8	10	20

Continued/

TABLE 3 continued

Yearly	1946	1956	1966	1976
Clothing (R)	3,78 (6/ 2)	7,75 (10/ 3)	11,16 (15/ 3)	24 (35/ 14)
Cash Bonus (R)	0	0,33 (2, 0)	1,42 (8, 0)	19,5 (36, 2)
Grazing Rights	1 x 2 head 5 x 5 head 1 unlimited	1 x 2 head 5 x 5 head 1 unlimited	2 x 0 head 1 x 2 head 4 x 5 head	3 x 0 head 2 x 2-5 with conditions 2 x 5 head
Grazing Horses	1	1	1	1

Fuel for fires is mostly unlimited - all provided free.

Five of the <sup>seven</sup> farmers pay doctors fees for staff and six pay hospital fees for staff. Two pay doctors fees for families, four pay hospital fees for families.

All transport to town for medical attention by doctors (24 - 40 Km. a single trip) is provided by farmer. Making the staff pay for visits to the doctor for their families, definitely reduces the number of requests for trips to town.

Four farmers also provided land 0,7 Ha (1/0) per labourer, in all cases allowing them to plough with the tractor, and in three cases providing seed, and in two cases fertiliser.

There is no doubt that most families' incomes are supplemented by cash from members working on mines or in towns - very often the farmer being left to care for the wives and children of these wage-earners. On our farm we keep a small cost-price store with basic provisions such as tea, sugar, soap, meal, flour, paraffin etc. With a staff of 11 adults the store has a monthly average turnover of R80 - R100 compared with R10 a month some 10 years ago. Some spend almost their entire cash earnings on these items. We have tried keeping Kupugani foods, after a Health Educator (black) had visited to tell of the benefits of proper diets etc., but the demand for these products dwindled in one year from a fair amount to nothing.

Three years ago our staff were offered the choice of an increase of R4 a month (the cost of the ration to us) or their ration of 1/4 sheep per month, if they took the cash they could then buy sheep at 1/2 price. They took the R4 increase, but not one has ever bought sheep though they do, of course, eat all meat from stock that die.

Farmers are aware of the need to raise salaries, but one of the difficulties here is the fluctuation in income due to the variations in the farming seasons and also the fluctuations in the price of meat and wool in particular. The following table of results of the Cathcart Mail-In Record Study Group (Govern-

ment run) will give some indication of this. Six out of the seven farmers who supplied information for this paper are members of the Study Group, so the figures would be a fair approximation of figures for all seven.

TABLE 4

## Revenue and Costs : Cathcart Study Group

	1967/68	1968/69	1969/70	1970/71	1971/72	1972/73	1973/74	1974/75
Gross Farm Income (R)	34 219	31 990	30 535	26 142	29 292	46 112	55 594	48 633
Total Costs (R)	15 914	16 603	23 767	16 738	16 374	24 419	27 984	29 599
Net Farm Income (R)	18 305	15 388	6 769	9 403	12 917	21 513	29 533	18 157
Return on Capital (%)	9,4	9,0	2,8	4,8	6,6	10,3	12,0	6,3
Total Regular Labour Costs (R)	3 344	3 359	3 663	3 174	3 240	3 584	5 575	6 176
Highest in group						5 674	8 972	10 110
Lowest in group						3 322	4 325	5 008
Labour as proportion of total labour costs (%)	21,0	20,2	15,4	18,9	19,8	21,9	19,9	20,8
Income per R100 labour costs (R)		458	184	244	360	501	514	267
Cost per regular labourer per month (R)				17,51	18,80	20,55 (22/18)	29,50 (36/20)	39,00 (59/25)

obviously there are considerable variations from farm to farm.

Casual Labour

Apart from gangs of between 6 and 10 shearers who come in for from 7 - 14 days a year, all casual labour (mostly for working in the lands) is drawn from the families of the regular employees, usually women and teenage girls.

Shearers rates have gone from 2½ cents per sheep in 1956 to 10 cents per sheep, today (1976), and in addition rations and a sheep for 500 or 1000 sheep shorn is given. Daily rates for women and teenagers were 7½ - 10 cents in 1956 and now vary from 20 - 30 cents per day.

5. MECHANISATION

Farmers in the group varied considerably in their estimation of the extent to which further mechanisation would enable them to reduce the size of their labour force (from 0% to 50%),

In the type of farming here, it does not pay to buy large items of machinery for the very limited periods for which they are required each year, and one of the changes that will need to be faced is the possibility of buying equipment (for hay making etc.) on a share basis with one or more neighbours. An average of 213 Ha (44/ 43) is cultivated, some of it under permanent pastures. An average of 9.8% (34/2) is cultivated.

6. LAND TENURE

All farms involved in this study are owner farmed - none of them renting extra ground. Some used to, but have given it up.

7. AGRIBUSINESS

There are no large syndicates or over-large farming enterprises in the Cathcart district. Differences in the sizes of farms of group involved in this study are included in the table of Population on the Land (Table I).

8. MIGRATION

Using figures for the past 2 years, there has been a yearly turnover of 17% (31 · 11) of the staffs through resignations, and a further 5% (17/ 0) through dismissals. Of these, an estimated 50% have probably gone to work in towns, although officially this is not possible, as their pass books are endorsed for Farm Labour only. One or two who left for town, have since returned to ask for their jobs back, as they said they were worse off financially in the towns. The other half who left, are employed on farms, mostly in the same area of the district.

Ten years ago there was no difficulty in replacing staff. Today it may take 2 - 12 months to fill a post.

Nearly all male youths on the farms go to the mines for a 6 - 9 months contract before coming back to go through circumcision ceremonies. Those who then cannot be absorbed by the farmer, leave to work on roads, in towns etc.

9. QUALITY OF LIFEHousing

For their main living quarters 62% (100/ 0) live in the traditional mud/thatch huts, 13% (60/ 0) in brick/iron dwellings, 21% (100/ 0) in brick/thatch, and 4% (40/ 0) in brick/asbestos. Many of the newer buildings consist of more than one room, and all staff have one or more additional mud/thatch huts. Larger buildings, with more windows, fireplaces with chimneys, are not popular, partly because of the cold climate, and partly because of tradition.

Four farms have water laid on in the houses - others having to walk 133m (250/ 000) to the nearest water, and two provide shower facilities with hot water, which are appreciated by the staff. None provide toilet facilities. The other amenities are all very recently installed.

In the last 5 - 10 years there has been a marked increase in the purchase of furniture by the staff, particularly for beds, easy chairs and dining or kitchen tables and chairs. Most families have an F.M. radio set, and some record players. No recreational facilities are provided for adults.

On all farms until recently, leave has been given to staff only when requested by them for specific reasons. In 1976 two of the group are giving 2 weeks leave, and the others still only on request.

In 1946 and 1956 no week-ends were given off, except in cases of family illness, or death or some domestic problem. Even in 1966, week-ends were not given off regularly - now in 1976, six give regularly, five giving every alternate week-end, and one giving once a month but for longer time. Until about 1960 Saturday was a full working day, - by 1966 it was sometimes a half day. Now all except one in the group give every Saturday afternoon off.

Working Hours: In midsummer a working day is 11½ hours (12/ 10)  
In midwinter a working day is 8 hours (8/ 8 ).

10. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WORKERS AND FAMILIES

A micro-study of farm schools in the Cathcart District has been done in a separate paper for this Conference<sup>\*</sup>, so only a few facts for the seven in this group are included here).

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\* Brian Levy, Farm Schools in South Africa : An Empirical Study.

Five of this group have schools on their farms - other children having to walk 2 - 3½Km to school. Of the schools attended three schools offer up to Std. 2, three offer to Std. 4 and one to Std. 5. Attendance depends largely on the weather for those who walk, but over 90% of those eligible do attend, even if not very regularly. The parents of the children generally are not concerned about their children being educated, and do little to encourage children to attend or to be punctual. In the higher standards (2 - 5) the girls greatly outnumber the boys.

Although theoretically it is possible to obtain a subsidy on the erection of school buildings to cover the cost of windows, roof and doors, only one in the group has ever received it (R180).

To open a new school, or increase the number on the staff, usually means paying the new teacher's salary for at least 1 school quarter from school funds (usually at a much lower rate than in a subsidised post - at present the rate being about R30 a month). Many farmers subsidise the cost of exercise books for the children. Farmers also provide transport for school children to attend school concerts (held on Sundays as fund-raising functions) at schools in the same area. For recreation, two schools provide netball, and one has swings as well.

The provision of schooling for the staff is becoming a debatable asset for the farmer, as more and more of those who learn to read and write then leave the farm to seek work in factories etc. in the towns, so the farmer loses his best potential workers.

Training for the workers themselves is limited to whatever training the farmer himself gives while working with the staff, with the exception of a few tractor maintenance courses held from time to time. Only half the group felt that these courses had made an appreciable difference to the level of efficiency of those who attended.

#### 11. FARM WORKERS OWN PERCEPTIONS

It is virtually impossible for farmers to discuss working conditions and problems and difficulties with their staff because, due to long ingrained attitudes, the employees always give the answers they hope will please and not necessarily the real facts.

As far as remuneration is concerned, some of the employees (admittedly a steadily decreasing number) do now know what their salary is, and those who come seeking work seldom if ever enquire what they will be receiving before accepting the post. Because of this lack of understanding of money, bonus schemes are not as effective as they would be otherwise. Any cash bonus given is appreciated, but most times there is no understanding of the basis on which it has been calculated e.g. nearly all farmers in the group give a bonus for every lamb and calf that is weaned to the herds in charge of them, but the herd would expect the same bonus whether it was a good or bad lambing season. Recently when a member of our staff left, the others were given a choice of higher pay with some extra work OR employing a new worker to fill the vacant post. Quite unanimously, without hesitation, and without enquiring what increase in pay was being offered, they decided they would prefer an extra worker to be employed. In other choices too, there has always been a preference for less work, and more time off, to higher wages.

Also in regard to wages, there is no doubt that most staff (especially the older ones) would prefer to have grazing rights to higher cash salaries, not only because they would in many cases be better off financially, but because of the traditional custom of counting wealth in terms of cattle. However, under the newer grazing systems adopted involving expensive licks and supplements for the stock, it is impossible to accommodate the inferior quality stock of the staff.

## 12. AGRICULTURE AND THE STATE

An average of R64 per annum (100/23) is paid in Workmen's Compensation premiums - whereas claims over the past 5 years have averaged at less than 1 per farmer per year - the amounts for each claim being between R10 - R15. The very controversial levy of 40 cents per labourer (male and female) per month by the Bantu Affairs Administration Board, is a very sore point with the farming community, because there is no benefit whatever to the farmer for the levies paid. Only one of the group has ever applied for labour to be supplied and is still waiting after 30 months. It would seem that the monies paid by farmers are being used to provide salaries and offices for B.A.A.B. officials and to subsidise amenities for those living in town locations. To add insult to injury, notices of a political meeting were sent to one farm from the B.A.A.B. offices, and that without any consultation with the farmer!

No prison labour is used in this area.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The old tribal customs and traditions are falling away among the staff to a large extent, resulting in a noticeable decrease in parental control over the children. Illegitimacy is very prevalent among teenage girls, resulting in many extra children for whose welfare the farmer is in a sense responsible, although most farmers try to avoid becoming involved in the domestic and personal affairs of the staff.

There is a serious lack of knowledge on the part of the farmer with regard to the tribal customs and traditions of the staff, resulting very often in a lack of understanding and break-down in communication between them. Guidelines in articles and pamphlets on understanding and motivating black workers do not seem to be effective when applied to farm labourers in these parts.

Higher wages have inevitably resulted in a greater 'drink' problem, especially over week-ends. One wonders whether the provision of recreational facilities to provide some occupation for off-duty times would help at all. Higher wages are no guarantee of a higher standard of living, for very often, as soon as there is any increase in available cash, relatives from city locations (usually children) arrive and have to be fed. Additional pensioners also tend to have the same effect of increased families. However, in spite of both the responsibility and nuisance value of having so many living on the farm, none of the farmers would accept Migratory Labour as an alternative unless forced to by law.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

Farming methods and practices have changed quite dramatically in the last couple of decades, with science and technology providing opportunity for progress in production levels, in agriculture and animal husbandry, but, as always, progress in the areas of personnel management, motivation of staff, etc. has been slower because of the personal relationships involved, and human nature being what it is! However, it is obvious that changes are coming with respect to farm labour. Either farmers will have to pay higher wages, for shorter hours of work, provide better housing with electricity etc. or do the work themselves (many farmers in Australia and New Zealand run farms of comparable size single-handed). This might necessitate reducing the number of different enterprises on a particular farm, or considering co-operative farming with neighbours.

Higher wages for the present staff would need to be accompanied by higher productivity, and a willingness to accept responsibility. The Study Group Regional Economists advise that already too high a percentage of our costs go for labour.

Unlike the industrialists, the farmer is unable to increase the selling price of what he produces to cover the increased costs of production. The seasonal fluctuations of the wool and even daily fluctuations of the meat markets make budgeting and planning just that much more difficult than it would otherwise be for farmers who have had little or no training in business management (both financial and managerial). In this field, there is no doubt of the benefit derived from the Study Group sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Services, and the yearly two-day Farm Economics Courses run in conjunction with Rhodes University.

Very few of the present staff, if given a choice, would prefer to change to a 'cash' only basis of payment, but until this change comes, it is very difficult to make an accurate comparison between farm and city wages. Farming is a 'way of life' for most farmers, and perhaps for those who work for the farmer, the desire to be away from the 'rat race' and attendant evils of city life will prove an adequate inducement to some to stay on the land.