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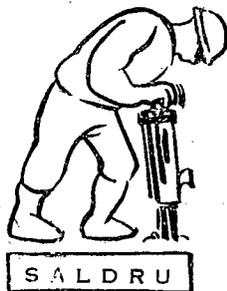
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Notes on Farm Labour in the Albany District

E. Van der Vliet  
and  
N. Bromberger



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School of Economics, University of Cape Town.

PATTERNS OF FARM EMPLOYMENT IN AN AREA OF THE  
ALBANY MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT, AND THEIR CHANGES  
OVER TIME: SOME SUMMARY RESULTS FROM A PILOT STUDY.

by Edward van der Vliet  
and Norman Bromberger

Aim of the Study:

The general objective was to investigate in an intensive way a number of questions which are connected with the accurate measurement of employment and unemployment in the South African white farming sector. It is hoped that a larger study will grow out of this preliminary investigation, benefiting in its design and focus from the results of the pilot study. The rough list of questions that lie at the centre of this work are as follows:

- 1) has employment (in particular, regular full-time employment) been decreasing (or not) on farms in this area?
- 2) what is the size of the African farm population relative to the number of regular workers, and what is their relationship to the workers?
- 3) what labour-services are provided by the African farm population or, what employment is there available for them?
- 4) are there many in this population who are unemployed?
- 5) do any of them work off the farm on which they live? do farmers hire workers from outside their own farms?
- 6) how good is the Agricultural Census as a source for summarising the total employment position on their farms?

Results are presented here in a rather undigested form as there has simply not been time to work over the material more carefully. It is clear moreover that the data reveals contrary tendencies (and perceptions). Even in so small a sample of farmers as this - and in explaining the past and predicting the future they obviously have as many problems as other people. In consequence the pictures that emerge from the responses to some of the questions lack clarity, but that itself may be an important fact about the situation. It may also be of course that some of the questions need clarification! Comments and criticisms will be very welcome.

Selection of the Sample:

Selection of farms was controlled beforehand for type (extensive livestock farming, with or without minor enterprises), size (economic units) and length of uninterrupted ownership (minimum of 10 years so as to provide

time perspective). Farms were chosen from an area near Grahamstown, and were all visited by van der Vliet (who carried out all the field work). An undertaking was given that information would be treated confidentially. There were no refusals - 10 farms were visited.

Question 1: Type and Size of Farm:

They are all extensive livestock farms (beef and sheep) with minor enterprises drawn from the following: dairying, poultry, peaches, vegetables, flowers, chicory. There is also production of fodder crops for on-farm consumption, and production of maize and milk for consumption by own farm staff. The size of farm is variable, but they are all economic units (it is possible to 'make a decent living' on them) and all farmers are engaged in farming full-time.

Question 2: Number of regular resident workers on farm:

All regular workers reported were African and male. For the ten farms the average regular labour complement was 8,4 and the range was 5 - 11.

Question 3: Number of farm population (other than regular workers and Owner's family).

We give the total population for all ten farms broken down by sex and age.

M A L E S				F E M A L E S				Total Population of 'others'
<18 yrs.	≥ 18 yrs.	Pensioners	Total	<18 yrs.	≥ 18 yrs.	Pensioners	Total	
213	3	12	228	235	126	26	387	615

Total African farm population (including regular workers) is thus 699 (615 + 84). The overall ratio of regular workers to 'others' is 1:7,3.

Question 4: a) What are the relationships of these 'others' (the rest of the African farm population) to the regular workers?

b) Are any not closely related?

a) Wives, children, parents, grandchildren (parents work in town) and adopted grandchildren (illegitimate children of daughters). This accounts for almost all dependants. (See responses to Q.5).

- b) There are a few others: worker's sister's child (adopted orphan);  
 3 daughters-in-law with children (husbands working in town or deceased);  
 1 pensioner unrelated to any current regular workers.

Question 5: a) Do you control residence of 'others'? Why?

b) What happens to those you do not want to live on the farm?

- a) Yes (100% reply), and usually 'strictly'.

In explanation of the need to control residence farmers say that they feel that i). If they didn't they would be flooded by people looking for a cheap way to live - they would use water, wood, building materials and other privileges on the farm, even if they didn't obtain direct rations.

ii) As regards rations farmers fear they they might have to feed them - either directly (to prevent starvation) or indirectly through extra rations for their regular workers (to whom the 'hangers-on' would be a burden but to whom they would not feel themselves able to refuse food). Farmers thus feel that in addition to their own interests they are protecting their workers and their families. iii) Farmers feel 'leeglêers' will unsettle working staff - socially as well as economically. iv) They also fear damage to fences etc. and theft of produce and stock by squatters.

v) One farmer however is willing to stretch the concept of 'dependants' because he feels people should be allowed to live with their kin. ('Thou patriarch is here') - he has the highest dependant: worker ratio (9,4:1) and also unemployment problems. <sup>1/</sup>

Farmers do in general allow an influx of outsiders for holidays, especially family/clan gatherings at Christmas.

Farmers in this area say that labour-intensive farmers (e.g. those in pineapple farming) elsewhere are less strict about controlling residence: they use the extra women in the fields.

- b) Answers to the question of where people go who are not allowed to stay on the farms are not altogether satisfactory. Two farmers said they didn't know. Two said they go to the Homelands (either because of the 'easy life' or to retire). A few (the elderly) go to other farms and relations - where this is allowed.

<sup>1/</sup> The 9,4:1 ratio is provisional. The 'unemployment' problems appear to relate to work-opportunities for females - but this is not certain.

Most farmers however think that the 'leavers' go to town (Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth) and that many of the young (uninitiated) men go to the mines (especially the coal mines). In the answers to Q.9 there is some further discussion of young people leaving. Comment: Ideally here one would like a little more distinction between cases i) where people are prevented from settling and ii) where people are turned off the farm and iii) where people voluntarily leave - with or without approval.

Question 6: What work do those members of the farm population who are not regular workers do (if any)? How many of them are involved in the various activities?

There are three categories of work they perform:

- 1) Domestic: cooking, cleaning, looking after children, washing clothes, gardening.
- 2) 'Short days' work done by dairy maids, poultry women, also milking and feeding.
- 3) Seasonal hoeing, picking, reaping, harvesting, thinning, bush clearing, weed control, silage making, wool sorting, herding, dipping and dosing, veld burning, calving and lambing.

'Short day' work is not seasonal but is performed year-round. It is not regarded as constituting the relevant workers as 'regular workers' because of the shorter hours - and perhaps because it is usually performed by women and juveniles. The seasonal work will often involve working with the regular workers - or under their supervision.

## WORK PERFORMED BY NON-REGULAR WORKERS, MEMBERS OF THE FARM POPULATION

(10 FARMS)

Type of work Age & Sex of Workers	1. Domestic		2. Full-time but short-days				3. Seasonal			
	M $\geq$ 18	F $\geq$ 18	F <18	F $\geq$ 18	M <18	M $\geq$ 18	F $\geq$ 18	M < 18	F < 18	
Total Number of workers	1	22	3	9	11 <sup>+</sup>	4	157 <sup>⊗</sup>	64 <sup>⊗</sup>	97 <sup>⊗</sup>	
Maximum per Farm	1	3	2	3	8	2	28	22	27	
Minimum per Farm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total days per annum worked	290	6 390	730	2 581	1 187	749	7 836	1 845	3 958	
Maximum per farm	290	880	365	730	672	435	2 843	649	1 440	
Minimum per farm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of farms not applicable	9	1	8	4	7	7	1	5	4	

<sup>+</sup> Includes two small boys helping with milking at weekends.

<sup>⊗</sup> These figures are not numbers of workers. They are obtained by adding together the number of workers engaged in each district seasonal process & since some workers do 2 or 3 types of seasonal work over the year double - and treble - counting is involved. The number of district workers involved is (fairly accurately) 75 (F  $\geq$  18), 45 (M < 18) and 65 (F < 18), or a total of 189 seasonal workers with the inclusion of the 4 (M  $\geq$  18) workers. Together the seasonal workers are responsible for 14 388 man-days of labour - or roughly 50 man-years (of 290 man-days).

## Notes to the table:

- 1) Age/Sex columns have been omitted if there were no workers in the respective categories.
- 2) Much of the labour by those under 18 years is done part-time (after school) and during school holidays; this applies especially to boys since girls are often unmarried mothers and no longer go to school.
- 3) Some pensioners (here included with M  $\geq$  18) still work part-time (seasonally) or as gardeners or do other light work.
- 4) Most of the labour is voluntary and workers are usually keen to have the employment. On some farms, however, persuasion on the part of the farmer is required to bring out some workers - this applies especially to grown married women.

Question 7: How many of the non-regular workers (just enumerated) do you have at work on 31 August - the Agricultural Census date for enumerating 'Casual Workers'?

Note: Farmers do not see the 'short-day' workers as casual workers (nor do they regard them as 'regular workers', so that apparently they slip through the net: can this be checked?). The Agricultural Census counts domestic labour as a separate category - so that really the question is about what is here called 'seasonal' work. (Note also that Q.12 deals with 'occasional' labour - on these farms often drawn from outside the resident farm population.

- 1) We do not have a detailed analysis of the time-pattern of seasonal work through the year. It is possible to say broadly that it is mainly done in June (hoeing), September-October (shearing) and November - February (hoeing and harvesting) - with the peak towards the end of the year.
- 2) 2) Only 2 farmers normally have seasonal workers active on 31 August: one for shearing ( $2 \times M < 18$ ;  $8 \times F < 18$ ) and one for weed control ( $10 \times F \geq 18$ ). One other may undertake weed control and hoeing - it depends on the rain, since weeds are best pulled out of soft, wet ground ( $6 \times F \geq 18$ ;  $2 \times F < 18$ ). This means that the 31 August catches a maximum of 28 seasonals out of a total of 189 (or 209, if the 'short-days' are added in). We return to this question in the final section of the paper - where we deal with farmers' answers to the question of how they actually filled in the Census questionnaire.

Question 8: Do any of the farm population (while living daily on the farm) work elsewhere nearby?

No - (7); Yes - (3)

- a) Temporarily and Intermittently: no males, 3 females ( $\geq 18$ ) and 12 females ( $< 18$ ). They are employed hoeing chicory and picking oranges on a neighbouring farm (= 'loan labour', not uncommon).
- b) Temporarily and Continuously: 1 male ( $\geq 18$ ). He is employed in a Divisional Council road gang while they are in the area but will leave this employment when the gang moves on. While farmers do help each other by 'lending' labour occasionally this is not likely to happen on a permanent basis: work on a farm is a condition of residence there, and this is so especially for men.

Question 9: Do any of the farm population (while retaining residence rights) work elsewhere on a temporary migrant basis?

No - (5); Yes - (5).

Numbers currently involved per year: 7 males (3 X  $\geq$  18; 4 < 18) and 7 females (all  $\geq$  18).

Men go to the mines (underground work) or Divisional Council (road) work) or Port Elizabeth (e.g. brickfields) usually for 6-12 months. They acquire no skills of value to the farmers - working as unskilled labourers in their migrant jobs.

Women go to the town (Grahamstown) - seek employment as domestics. They work + 4 months or until they lose their jobs. They want 'pin-money'. Skills acquired, if any, are not useable.

- 1) We are not really clear about the status of such migrants. Their residence rights derive through their parents - but in the long run on most farms will depend on the availability of jobs (and these are not guaranteed).
- 2) There is clearly inter-farm variation in the sample. One farmer won't allow temporary migration - because he is short of labour on the farm. Others put no obstacles in the way of Kwediens going off to the mines or town - often (so it is said) so as to be able to pay for their initiation rites. They are often not wanted back (there are others to take their places) - and frequently they don't return. Sometimes they come back to the farm after some years, married and with children, and wanting to settle down.

Question 10: Are women a part of your labour-force? Comment.

Yes - (10).

Farmers' comments included:-

- 1) Women are more efficient, reliable, meticulous - especially at certain jobs like wool sorting (requiring meticulousness), and milking on Sundays (requiring reliability).
- 2) There are 'women's jobs' (like hoeing, and cleaning the separator) which men won't do.
- 3) Women are the only source of seasonal labour for peak periods - they constitute a reserve pool of labour available at short notice.
- 4) Employing them boosts the incomes of on-farm households - and is less costly than (where this is the alternative) employing more regular male labour with dependants.

The use of women for light, seasonal and specialised work is said to be on the increase (See Q. 17 for further discussion).

Question 11: Unemployment: how many of the farm population are employed  
a) Involuntarily (won't work but not available), b) voluntarily (don't want to work)? c) Do any of the voluntarily unemployed have other income?

No unemployment - (7); unemployment - (3)

	Males	Females
a) Involuntary	0	0
b) Voluntary	2	(5 (on farm where extra kin allowed) (6 housewives won't work - 'too lazy').
c) Other Income	disability grants	incomes from working husbands:

Farmers' comments included :

- 1) Those who do not want to work are sent away (including single women)
- 2) Children all go to school - hence less under 18 persons unemployed (than would otherwise be the case).
- 3) 'No involuntary unemployment - if people want extra work I'll find work for them' (e.g. weed control).

As regards the housewives who are voluntarily unemployed, some women appear only to work for wages under duress (as noted earlier). Some farmers report that domestic help is sometimes more difficult to obtain than seasonal. One view advanced to explain this is that with higher wages for regular labourers there is less pressure on the women to augment the household income.

Note:- Farmers' comment 3) above raises questions of Involuntary under employment of seasonal workers. This was not investigated.

Question 12: Outside labour: does the farm employ outside (non-resident) labour either a) skilled workers or b) unskilled workers?  
Details?

- a) Skilled workers: No - (2); Yes - (8).

Type of work	No. of workers	Days worked	Origin of workers
Building (African houses)	11	712	Coloured - mainly Grahamstown.
Fencing	10	1 196	District - neighbouring farms.
Shearing	36	1 357	Professional team from Grahamstown + neighbouring farms.
Painting	3	216	Grahamstown
	60	3 481	

\* Some workers are counted several times - as they worked on several farms at different times in the year. All above workers are males.

Note:

- 1) In one case 'no skilled labour required now that the farm is fully developed'.
- 2) Building, painting and (partly) fencing are only occasional activities and the requisite skills are normally (though not exclusively) not available on farms.
- 3) Shearing is a dying trade (see paper by A. Kooy) despite good (seasonal) pay. Some farmers still have their own shearers; others contract a professional team the average age of which is estimated at 75 years! ('My ma was 'n tombi in die rinderpest' - (1896). Hence talk of introducing electric shears - the work will be easier, lighter and faster.

b) Unskilled workers: Males: No - (7); Yes - (3).

Females: No - (5); Yes - (5).

Males - 14 workers; 840 days p.a. (total for 3 farms involved).

Females - 45 workers; 1 217 days p.a. (total for 5 farms involved).

Men do : bush clearing, harvesting, weed control.

Women do : hoeing, weed control, picking.

Most of the above 60 workers (who perform 2 057 man-days = roughly 7 man-years of labour) are on loan from neighbouring farms; though one farmer uses a team of convicts (8) for heavier work during harvesting (carrying sacks) and has another two men who are out on parole.

CHANGES OVER TIME:

Farmers were asked how the situation in respect of most of the issues treated so far had changed during the last 10 years. They were then asked their opinions about how they expected things to change during the next 10 years.

Question 13: Change in number of regular workers.

- a) Past 10 years: no change - (5); increase - (0); decrease - (5).  
Total decrease in number of labourers = 21.

This implies a 20% decrease in the regular labour force during the last decade (21/84 + 21).

Most changes have been gradual; two changes were sudden because of changes in enterprises (details not available) and the sacking of redundant labour.

Farmers' comments on decreases: rise in labour costs/they are more efficient when fewer/kwediens now go to school and leave the farms - which they didn't before; 'I pay more but don't replace leavers - I now use more women/I mechanised because labour is too unreliable'.

- b) Next 10 years: no change - (4); increase - (0); decrease - (3); (decrease - (3) probably).

Total expected decrease in labourers = 6 or more.

Farmers' comments on expected decreases: Rise in labour costs - I'd rather 'specialise in 900 good men' and pay more/use seasonal labour from outside/will keep on less workers if I change enterprises (chicory grower) - marginal enterprise in this area/may decrease if I mechanise shearing/people do not want to work on farms and labour costs are going up - I may have to give up milking altogether/I'd rather mechanise (milking machines) and become more efficient.

Note: In all this talk the increased cost of labour (cash wages and the cost of payment in kind e.g. in one case the cost of the Christmas clothing bonus has risen from R100 to R225 in 3 years) is most frequently mentioned. Coupled with this is what some experience as decreased availability. Another contributory factor may be that machines are easier to 'handle' than people - farmers complain much of incessantly being called upon, especially over weekends, for help and medical assistance - and of the 'trouble' of managing staff.

Question 14: Change in farm population.

- a) Past 10 years: no change - (2); increase - (6); decrease - (2).  
b) Next 10 years: no change - (4); increase - (3); decrease - (3).

Presumably has been a net decrease - because families of 21 workers have disappeared (affects 5 farms). Offsetting the reduction in workers has been the high rate of natural increase (including high birthrate among unmarried young women) and the 'dumping' of families on grandparents by town workers.

Some farmers already see evidence of successful effects of birth control propaganda - and more expect it to have positive effects in the next decade (It's getting home to them that the less children the better').

Question 15: Change in the ratio of 'others' to regular workers.

- a) Past 10 years: no change - (1); increase - (6); decrease - (3).  
 b) Next 10 years: no change - (3); increase - (2); decrease - (5).

(Not clear that predictions for question 13, 14, 15 are entirely consistent). Considerations here much the same as for Q.14. Actual figures for the ratio in last decade are not really known - van der Vliet judges that probably it has increased over the last 10 years, slowing down towards 1976. Again emphasis on increasing acceptance of birth control. Some farmers import films, town nurses etc. - and wives assist. Others do not appear concerned.

Question 16: Changes in types of work done by 'others' on farm.

- a) Past 10 years: no changes - (5); changes - (5).  
 b) Next 10 years: no changes - (6); changes - (3); unknown - (1).

The changes mentioned for the last decade are the increased use of women casuals in place of male regulars and casuals; the use of own-farm women for bush control now that the Ciskei group don't come any longer; the introduction of new machines (e.g. silage cutters) with new complementary labour tasks. The most interesting expected change (by one farmer) is the substitution of women for 3 men in milking - once a milking machine has been installed.

Question 17: Changes in the amount of work-time done by 'others'.

- a) Past 10 years: no change - (2); increase - (4); decrease - (4).  
 b) Next 10 years: no change - (5); increase - (1); decrease - (4).

In the past decade different farmers appear to have gone in opposing directions - some towards more planting and weeding, others towards less; some towards new enterprises requiring added labour, others away from such enterprises. (At this stage of the investigation data was not collected systematically on changes in enterprises). At least one expectation of decreased casual/seasonal work was based on the planned introduction of chemical weedkillers and the reduction of hand-hoeing.

Question 18: Change in live-on-farm-and-work-nearby.

Question 19: Change in temporary migrancy.

Both practices are currently fairly restricted. Few thought they had changed much - or were due to change much. Where changes were reported or expected they were linked with the view that people moving off the farms for work are now more likely to do so permanently than before: one view about a contributory reason for this is that the payment of labola is diminishing (and earning labola was a reason for temporary migrancy).

Question 20: Change in unemployment on the farm.

- a) Past 10 years: no change - (8); Increase - (0); decrease - (2).  
 b) Next 10 years: no change - (7); Increase - (1); unknown - (2).

The predominant view of the 'no changes' (past and future) is that unemployment is not a farm problem. Two farmers thought unemployment (or underemployment?) among women had decreased because women were now used more in cash crop cultivation; and a dominant reason for those thinking it would increase (or might increase) in future was the possibility that cash crops and intensive enterprises would be cut back in the area.

Question 21: Change in the employment of outside labour.

Clearly (as with the other issues) experience and expectations are diverse. 'No changers' are in the majority - but amongst the 'changers' those having experienced, and expecting, an increase in outside employment predominate. At the skilled level this has to do with increased building of workers' housing, with need for skilled men to work anticipated machines, and with need to supplement own reduced regular labour-force with outside skills (shearers, fencers and so on). At the unskilled level the picture is less clear but the need to supplement a reduced own work-force is also present.

#### AGRICULTURAL CENSUS

Question 22: What do you understand by 'casual labour' referred to in the Agri. Census?

Generally understood that it was all labour (from own farm or outside) doing seasonal or occasional work - and not on the regular monthly-paid-and-rationed staff Note: the 'short days' are included (apparently) neither as regular nor casual nor domestics!

A list is available of tasks normally done by regulars and by casuals - but it is not reproduced here because there is a good deal of overlapping.

Question 23: What did you fill in as the number of casuals in your employ this 31st August?

Three filled in zero. The other seven filled in 9, 12, 10, 2 (skilled), 2, 10 (a daily average for August), and X (an annual average, figure not available).

- 1) In total the ten farmers recorded 45 + casual workers.
- 2) We know from Q. 7 that at most they are likely to employ 28 of their own casuals on 31 August, so the difference between 28 and 45 + must be made up by i) employment of outside skilled and unskilled workers - presumably skilled (see Q. 12 a)) and ii) the supplying of average figures referring to time periods other than August 31st.
- 3) The recorded 45 + needs to be compared with the actual total for the year of 189 (own seasonals) + 60 (outside seasonals - unskilled) + unspecified number of outside skilled workers + 20 'short-days' = 269 +. Unfortunately the comparison cannot be precise - but it is fairly clear that for this area 31 August is a bad date for capturing the scale of casual employment around the year.

Question 24: How did you compute remuneration for casuals for the year to 31st August?

This question did not succeed in its objective due to a misunderstanding. C. Simkins (SALDRU Working Paper No. 4) gets round the inadequate figure for casual employment in the Agri. Census by dividing the total annual remuneration of casuals by the average wage for regular workers - thus calculating a regular worker equivalent of annual casual employment. This question aimed to probe whether farmers in fact entered the remuneration of (in this case) 49 + casuals, or of 269 + casuals - and (whichever they did) whether they entered it with any care and accuracy.

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