

FARMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF LEGISLATION ON FARM WORKERS' WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS: AN EASTERN CAPE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The status of South African farm workers has changed significantly over the past five decades. Using data from three major surveys conducted between 1957 and 2008, an Eastern Cape district was used as a case study to assess farmers' perceptions of the changes that had occurred, particularly as a result of legislation. Considering the changes, the impacts on the farm labour market and wage and non-wage working conditions are analysed. The legislation focused on includes the Extension of Security of Tenure Act 62 (ESTA) of 1997, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 (BCEA) of 1997 and minimum wage legislation. Farmers believed legislation had both positive and negative effects, which were compounded by changes in the political and economic context. The case study reveals that government has a role in improving the status of farm labourers, with education and healthcare services requiring special attention. However, caution is needed to ensure that further reductions in farm employment are restricted.

Keywords: labour legislation, farm labour, conditions of service, wages

JEL Classification: J43

1. INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector has played and continues to play an important role in South Africa, as in the economies of many other countries, not only as a means of food security but also because of the opportunities for employment it offers. In South Africa, however, agriculture has shed labour, especially over the past 50 years: the number of labourers (regular and casual) employed in 2007 was only 60 per cent

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