

Vulnerable and marginalised South African farm workers' future hanging in the balance

Farm workers are an integral part of South Africa's economy and the food system. Yet they are often food insecure themselves, marginalised and vulnerable to exploitation.



Image source: [Gall/Getty](#)

This is according to Prof Ruth Hall of the University of the Western Cape (UWC)'s Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS). Hall is one of the co-directors for the upcoming [National Conference on The Future of Farm Workers in South Africa](#), which takes place at UWC from 16–18 October 2019.

Since 1994, pro-farm worker legislation has provided some protection to these workers, but it has also been associated with violations of labour rights and an accelerating pace of evictions and casualisation.

By design, the conference kicks off on World Food Day on 16 October. Agricultural employment is concentrated at specific times of year, and as a result seasonal farmworkers face an under-reported crisis of underemployment and seasonal hunger, adds conference co-director, Prof Stephen Devereux of UWC's Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the national Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE-FS).

A recent [study](#) found that as many as 88% of women farmworkers employed in the commercial farming sector in the Northern Cape report severe food insecurity during the winter months when work is scarce. This number drops to a still troubling 49% during harvest season, when work is meant to be more plentiful.

“ For South Africa's farmworkers, the future is uncertain. It is tragic and outrageous that the people who produce the food that we eat in South Africa are most likely to go hungry. - Professor Stephen Devereux ”

The national conference takes a South Africa-wide perspective. It will set out to highlight the centrality of farmworkers in the national economy and food system, at a moment when academic and policy attention is focused on other actors such as farmers (commercialisation of smallholders), markets ('supermarketisation' and big food), and consumers (food safety, obesogenic diets).

A second objective of the conference is to deepen the understanding and contribute to policy debates about issues facing farmworkers in South Africa, drawing on research and policy analysis but also on the perspectives of farmworkers themselves.

Also, since this conference is hosted by the NRF–Newton Fund SA-UK Research Chair in Social Protection for Food Security, a specific objective is to identify innovative ideas for social protection to address seasonal hunger among South African farmworkers.

Conference themes will include farmworker rights, farmworker resistance, labour force trends, agrarian transformations, the land debate, migration, food insecurity, and social protection.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>