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Gwiriri, L. C., Bennett, J., Mapiye, C. & Burbi, S.

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Unpacking the 'emergent farmer' concept: evidence from cattle farmers in South Africa.

Lovemore Gwiriri[1], James Bennett[2], Cletos Mapiye[3], Sara Burbi[4]

ABSTRACT

South Africa has historically perpetuated a dual system of freehold commercial and communal subsistence farming. To bridge these extremes, agrarian reform policies have encouraged the creation of a class of 'emergent', commercially – oriented farmers. However, these policies consider 'emergent' farmers as a homogeneous group of land reform beneficiaries, with limited appreciation of the class differences between them and do little to support the emergence of a 'middle' group of producers able to bridge this gap. This article uses a case study of 'emergent' livestock farmers in Eastern Cape Province to critique the emergent farmer *concept. We identify three broad categories of farmers within the emergent livestock sector: a*

[1]Lovemore Gwiriri: Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University, Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, Coventry CV8 3LG, United Kingdom. E-mail: gwiriril@uni.coventry.ac.uk; luvgwiriri@yahoo.com

[2]James E. Bennett: Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University, Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, Coventry CV8 3LG, United Kingdom. E-mail: apy073@coventry.ac.uk

[3]Cletos Mapiye: Department of Animal Sciences, Stellenbosch University Private Bag X1, Matieland 7602, Stellenbosch, South Africa. Email: cmapiye@sun.ac.za

[4] Sara Burbi: Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University, Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, Coventry CV8 3LG, United Kingdom. Email: ab9735@coventry.ac.uk

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large group who despite having accessed private farms remain effectively as subsistence farmers; a smaller group of small/medium scale commercial producers who have communal farming origins and most closely approximate to 'emergent' farmers; and an elite group of largescale, fully commercialised farmers, whose emergence has been facilitated primarily by access to capital and a desire to invest in alternative business ventures. On this basis we suggest that current agrarian reform policies need considerable refocusing if they are to effectively facilitate the emergence of a 'middle' group of smallholder commercial farmers from communal systems.

Keywords*:* Agrarian reform, emergent farmers, livestock production, custom feeding programme.

INTRODUCTION

Global food insecurity, particularly after the food crisis in 2008 (HLPE, 2012), has led to increased interest in the role smallholder agriculture can play in addressing food security in sub – Saharan Africa (SSA) (Muyanga et al., 2011; Sitko and Jayne, 2014). The ability of smallholder agriculture to achieve household and national food security and reduce rural poverty, however, remains strongly contested (Aliber and Hall, 2012; Sitko and Jayne, 2014). Debates have focused on land tenure (Lahiff, 2016; O'Laughlin et al., 2013), policy (Hall 2009), support mechanisms (Aliber and Hall, 2012; Okunlola et al., 2016), production models appropriate to transform subsistence smallholder agriculture to commercial agriculture (Aliber, 2011), and the appropriate conditions and strategies to sustainably intensify production (Pretty et al., 2011).

Agrarian reform, as a mechanism for commercializing smallholder agricultural production in SSA, has had mixed success and remains controversial (Peters, 2009; Cousins and Scoones, 2010). It is often underpinned by an assertion that production under communal tenure is inherently lower than under private tenure, the veracity which has been contested by several scholars (e.g., Mafeje, 2003; Moyo, 2003). These authors argue that in many parts of SSA, this dualism is less apparent because communal production systems have, at various points in time, been able to respond to market demands and produce competitively at commercial level, without the need for conversion to private tenure. Indeed, it has been argued that this was also true of South Africa for a brief period in the latter half of 19th Century, particularly in parts of the Eastern Cape, where small – scale African farmers successfully engaged in commercial production to meet the needs of an expanding settler market for grains such as barley, oats, wheat as well as wool (Bundy, 1988; Keegan, 1983). However, this expansion of the African peasantry in South Africa was short – lived and was systematically eroded during the late 19th and early 20th Century by a series of laws that limited both where Africans could live and the size of their land holdings, culminating in the Native Lands Act of 1913 (Commey, 2013; Lahiff, 2016). The complete restructuring of land holdings in homeland areas into relatively small (2 – 3 ha) arable plots that resulted from this ensured that Africans could not produce beyond a basic subsistence level and created the highly skewed communal – commercial divide that still characterises agricultural production in South Africa (Lahiff, 2014, 2016).

In South Africa, the approach has broadly aimed to encourage smallholder farmers into commercial production through redistribution of land. However, more than 20 years after South Africa's transition to democracy, the achievements of land reform remain debatable (Lahiff, 2016). While commercialization of smallholder agriculture has continued to be a key feature of South African agrarian reform policy (Mtero, 2012), provincial strategic plans (ADRI, 2013) and agricultural support policy (GCIS, 2016), the reality is that achieving this remains a major challenge. Beginning with the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) phase (2000 – 04), the agrarian reform process in South Africa began to focus on creating a class of so – called 'emergent' farmers, who have access to commercial farmland on either a freehold or leasehold basis and are able to transform from subsistence to commercial production (Hebinck et al., 2011). In spite of this, by 2010, 90 per cent of redistributed land was classified by the government as 'no longer productive' (Africa Research Institute, 2013: 3).

Hall (2009: 3) suggested that critical to agrarian reform will be the creation of conditions that enable farmers to produce and participate in local and national markets, referring to a 'missing middle' – the untapped potential of smallholder farmers to produce not just sufficient for their own consumption but also an excess for marketing. Cousins (2010: 16) suggests that '…reforms will contribute to reducing rural poverty in South Africa only if they create the conditions for a broadly – based accumulation from below', complemented by petty commodity production, creating the conditions required for the emergence of small – scale capitalist farmers who are well – supported to bridge the dual agricultural gap.

However, rather than focusing on creating the conditions necessary to support this ‘middle’ group of emergent farmers, agrarian reform policy in South Africa has continued to classify all land reform beneficiaries as ‘emergent’ farmers and entitled them to government support regardless. This includes, for example, relatively wealthy entrepreneurs who accumulate from above by using land reform to get access to farms for large – scale, commercial production. That such a wide variation in accumulation strategies is possible as an ‘emergent’ farmer in South Africa, raises questions about the utility of the emergent farmer concept and the effectiveness of the policies that underpin it in facilitating the desired transition of smallholder farmers from subsistence to small – scale commercial production.

This article critically examines the emergent farmer concept within the context of agrarian reform policy in South Africa. Particularly, it seeks to identify the different classes of emergent farmers that currently exist and understand the dynamics of accumulation within them. It begins by critically reviewing the emergent farmer concept within Southern Africa, how it has evolved and the agrarian reform policies that have shaped it. It then draws on case material from emergent livestock farmers in Eastern Cape Province, to examine the class differentiation apparent amongst them, the evidence (if any) for the emergence of a coherent ‘middle’ and the implications of this for policies designed to support them.

The emergent farmer concept.

In Southern Africa, the emergent farmer concept is vague and defies easy definition. In agrarian reform rhetoric, it has been applied either interchangeably or in conjunction with other terms, such as ‘emergent smallholder farmer’ or ‘small – scale commercial farmer’ (Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2010). It has frequently been used as a blanket term for all land reform beneficiaries, but as Poulton et al. (2008: 10) point out, there remains a ‘…common, but erroneous, assumption that all these farmers “emerge” from the ranks of local smallholders…’, when in fact this is clearly not the case. But what exactly is an emergent farmer, and importantly, does it enable an understanding of the question: emerging from what to what?

An interrogation of the literature suggests that currently ‘emergent’ farmers are characterised by a range of different accumulation strategies and varying levels of commercial productivity. At one end of the spectrum emergent farmers exist as fully commercialised farmers. Several scholars (see Benjaminsen et al., 2006; Cousins, 2010; Jayne et al., 2015) identified this group of farmers as 'emergent' black commercial farmers. In Zambia, Jayne et al. (2015: 3) described emergent farmers as '…medium – scale holders of between 5 hectares and 100 hectares, many of whom reside in urban areas' and have careers in non – farm sectors, labelling them 'emergent investor farmers'. In South Africa, Cousins (2010: 4), drawing on the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (2009), described them as '…financially capable, aspirant black commercial farmers (black business people who will mostly farm on a part time basis)'. In both cases, this group largely consists of farmers from a non – agricultural background, who invest in acquiring agricultural land. This idea is supported by Hall & Kepe (2017: 2), who term them 'black capitalist farmers'.

Emergent, black commercial farmers have largely acquired land through deliberate shifts in the tenure system by African governments to support access to land by a financially – endowed cohort of business people without a previously agrarian base. Jayne et al. (2015) argue that a deliberate government agrarian reform policy and public spending portfolio contributed to the development of emergent black commercial farmers in Zambia, through the creation of private tenure. In some instances, agrarian reform in SSA primarily consisted of conversion of customary tenure into private tenure (Mafeje, 2003). In Zambia, the 1995 Land Act permitted conversion of 280,000 hectares of customary land to free leasehold and one million hectares to block farms. Access to block farms required a 'non – refundable application fee of ZMK250,000–ZMK3,500,000 (roughly US$50–US$700)' (Sitko and Jayne, 2014: 197), which promoted land access by a relatively well – off, elite class of farmers. Similarly, access to land under LRAD in South Africa required personal contributions of a minimum of ZAR5 000[5] (US$385), promoting access to land by a wealthier elite class. In Zimbabwe, a 'black elite' of 'urban petty bourgeoisie' who accessed land based on political affiliation to the ruling party is described by Marongwe (2011: 1071). Cousins (2010: 16) underlines that, this Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) – type of agrarian reform is best described as a form of 'accumulation from above', as it has benefitted a small number of large – scale black commercial farmers. Aliber and Hall (2012: 560) employ the term 'accumulation for the few', while Tilzey (2017: 3) refers to a 'resurgent landed oligarchy'.

[5]ZAR is the official South African currency, the South African Rand. The current official exchange rate (as at 01 September 2018) of 1 South African Rand equivalent to 0.077 United States Dollars was used to convert ZAR to US$.

There are also emergent black commercial farmers who have emerged or transformed from the ranks of existing small – scale, communal farmers (Jayne et al. 2015). These constitute a second class of emergent farmers and are primarily, former smallholder farmers from communal areas who were already producing commercially and accessed private land through agrarian reform. Cousins (2010: 4), describes them as ‘expanding commercial smallholders’, who produce significantly above subsistence, and utilise surplus production income for capital agricultural accumulation. Aliber and Hall (2012: 548) refer to them as ‘sustainable commercial smallholders’ while Jayne et al. (2015: 15) refer to ‘commercialized African farmers’.

There is also a third group of emergent farmers, consisting of smallholder farmers who were producing only at a subsistence level in the communal areas, but who have nonetheless accessed private farmland through agrarian reform. Cousins (2010: 17), argued that through this process of ‘accumulation from below’ and related ‘petty commodity production’, these farmers, having been given access to land, might produce beyond subsistence, and reinvest and engage in capital accumulation from agriculture. Both this group and the second group described probably best represent the ‘missing middle’ (Hall 2009: 3) and ‘entrepreneur’ farmers (Cousins, 2010: 16), who are able to potentially bridge the current dichotomy in South African agriculture.

The ‘missing middle’ concept has also found application more broadly within SSA. In Zimbabwe, Scoones et al. (2011a: 976) identified ‘…a core group of “middle farmers”…who are gaining surpluses from farming, investing in the land and from off – farm work and so are able to accumulate from below’. Similarly, in Kenya, Neven et al. (2009: 1805) reported that suppliers of supermarket horticulture products consisted of emerging ‘middle class farmers’, whose scale of production was between traditional small farmers and commercial export farmers. Poulton et al. (2008) describes them as small – scale commercial or ‘investor’ farmers primarily producing for the market. The underlining characteristic of this ‘middle’ group is being able to produce beyond subsistence levels and market excess produce to enable forms of reinvestment and accumulation in agriculture.

Emergent farmers and agrarian reform: evidence from South Africa and Zimbabwe

The emergent farmer concept not only includes a wide range of classes of farmers but has also been strongly shaped by specific dynamics of agrarian reform within different countries and how these have changed through time. Here we use South Africa and Zimbabwe to illustrate how these differences have played out and the types of emergent farmers that have resulted.

In Zimbabwe, land reform had two main stages, namely the willing buyer – willing seller model (1979 – 99) followed by Fast Track Land Reform programme (FTLR) from 2000, both intended to encourage smallholder production above subsistence levels. The willing buyer – willing – seller model, had by 1999 resulted in the transfer of 1.4 million hectares of land consisting of five – hectare, small – scale commercial units (Scoones et al., 2011a). However, Dekker & Kinsey (2011: 996) argue that these resettled holdings are commonly misconstrued to have constituted the 'core of a new small – scale class of commercial farms' but were not actually intended for commercial production. Regardless, this first stage of agrarian reform seems to have been broadly founded in the ethos of accumulation from below. From 2000, FTLR re – distributed over 7.6 million hectares from 4,500 existing farms to smallholder farmers, accounting for 20 per cent of the total land transferred (Scoones et al., 2011a). FTLR, though chaotic and disorderly (Chiweshe et al., 2015), distributed larger land holdings resulting in A1 (subsistence – oriented) and A2 (commercially – oriented) smallholder farmers with mean holdings of 37 and 318 hectares respectively (Scoones et al., 2011b). This shift in approach to agrarian reform resulted in a broadening of the dynamics of accumulation that remains apparent in Zimbabwe and has resulted in the variety of 'emergent' farmers now in operation. These range from farmers who failed to make the transition and remain largely at a subsistence level, to a middle group who are producing and marketing surplus, to the emergence of a class of commercial (A2) black farmers producing on much larger farms. This represents a conceptual shift from a focus on accumulation from below to accumulation from both below and above, the latter involving an elite group of beneficiaries as identified by Marongwe (2011).

In South Africa, agrarian reform has followed a market – led tri – component approach, consisting of land restitution (based on the 1994 Restitution of Land Rights Act); land tenure reform and land redistribution (grounded in the Provision of Land and Assistance Act of 1993), all of which has been extensively reviewed (e.g., Aliber, 2011; Hall and Kepe, 2017; Jacobs et al., 2003; Lahiff, 2007, 2016; O'Laughlin et al., 2013; Okunlola et al., 2016). Slow progress in achieving its primary objective of redistributing 30 per cent of farmland (24.6 million hectares) has resulted in land reform evolving over three stages. The first was the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) from 1995 to 1999; the second LRAD from 2000 to 2005 and the latest is the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS), since 2006. Each stage represented a shift in policy and targeted beneficiaries in response to perceived failures of the previous phase. SLAG targeted the rural poor, smallholder or small – scale farmers, with the intention of creating capacity for them to engage in commercial production or into 'profit makers' as Ncube (2018: 2) suggests. SLAG was underpinned by a basic strategy of accumulation from below (Cousins, 2010) or growth from below (Shepherd et al., 2018). In contrast, the primary beneficiaries of agrarian reform under the Mbeki administration (1999 – 2008), particularly during the LRAD phase, shifted to encourage a financially – endowed elite into 'emerging commercial farmers' (Cousins, 2010:3) or 'black capitalist farmers' (Hall & Kepe, 2017: 2). Lahiff (2007) indicates that there was a deliberate shift in emphasis of the land redistribution policy from 2000, from the poor to the better – off.

However, despite these clear shifts in the targeting of land reform beneficiaries, government policy has continued to treat them as a homogenous group. For example, DAFF (2012) consistently refers to the 240,000 'emergent' farmers that have been created through the government's agrarian reform programmes, even though this might include at one extreme former communal farmers who have accessed farms collectively but produce almost nothing for commercial sale and at the other extreme, wealthy, investor farmers on large farms who are focused purely on commercial production. The enormous variation in what currently constitutes an 'emergent' farmer in South Africa is further complicated by other fundamental differences between them, for instance in the size of their land holdings. For example, Bradstock (2005) found land holdings ranging in size from 14 hectares to 346 hectares for households in land redistribution projects in Limpopo province. Likewise, in Eastern Cape Province, Aliber et al. (2006) reported land holdings ranging from 135 to 1,055 hectares, in their study of 42 farmers, all of whom were considered by government as 'emergent' farmers.

In the context of these debates and the highly variable application of the emergent farmer concept at different points in time and in different countries, it is difficult to arrive at a specific definition of an emergent farmer. Thus, the working definition we take into our analysis of smallholder farmers in South Africa is necessarily quite broad. We define emergent farmers as farmers who are able to produce and market agricultural produce beyond subsistence levels and reinvest and engage in capital accumulation in agriculture from below. They should be successful vertical integrators of agricultural production and marketing, contribute to poverty and unemployment alleviation and importantly, are able to demonstrate how they ‘emerge’ from one form to another, for example, from petty commodity production to small – scale capitalist production. They should constitute a ‘middle’ group between subsistence farmers and ‘investor’ commercial farmers, regardless of whether the latter group have benefitted from any form of land reform. In this sense the definition acknowledges not only the ability of farmers to produce at commercial scale but also how they reached this point, that is, through a process of accumulation from below rather than only the investment of existing capital in an alternative enterprise. Thus, we do not rule out the inclusion of fully commercialised farmers within this definition, as long as they have emerged from a subsistence context.

THE CASE OF COLLECTIVE LIVESTOCK MARKETING IN EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

To better understand the class – based divisions that characterise emergent farmers in South Africa, we use a case study of collective cattle marketing amongst emergent farmers in Eastern Cape Province. We draw on published studies, unpublished secondary data and primary data associated with custom feeding programme (CFP) initiatives designed to support cattle production amongst emergent farmers. Primary data was collected through in – depth interviews with 60 of the 155 farmers under Ikhephu Agricultural Secondary Cooperative (IASC) and secondary data was collated from IASC records.

The policy and practice of emergent livestock farming in Eastern Cape

Of the 240,000 farmers the government categorises as ‘emergent’ farmers in South Africa, those who have livestock own some 5.7 million cattle, or about 40 per cent of the national herd. It has been estimated by government that 87,000 of these emergent farmers have the potential to produce on a commercial scale (DAFF, 2012). To support entry and competitiveness of emergent farmers in livestock markets, the meat industry was deregulated through the introduction of the Marketing and Agriculture Act number 47 of 1996. However, the contribution of the emergent and smallholder livestock sector to the national economy has remained relatively low (Soji et al., 2015). Sotsha et al. (2017) argued that while deregulation increased market access for emergent and smallholder farmers, it opened – up market competition from established commercial farmers for local markets, more so for those emergent farmers who were aiming to become fully commercial. According to Aliber et al. (2006: 22), while emergent farmers occasionally marketed excess products, '…the evidence from Elliot land reform beneficiaries, at least as of late 2004/early 2005, was that they were barely marketing at all'[6]. Senyolo et al. (2009) indicated that emergent farmers occasionally sold their produce in the informal market.

Within the smallholder farming sector of the Eastern Cape, the market offtake for cattle has been reported as being just 5 per cent (e.g., Musemwa et al., 2010, Sotsha et al., 2017). This is despite the Eastern Cape having the highest provincial cattle population, accounting for 23 per cent of all cattle in South Africa, the majority (over 60 per cent) being in the communal sector (Grant et al., 2004; Mkabela, 2013). Therefore, the potential to produce beyond subsistence levels in the province remains largely untapped. Low cattle market offtake in communal areas has mainly been attributed to poor animal condition and weight (Mapiye et al., 2009); high mortality due to diseases and parasites (Scholtz and Bester, 2010) and low reproduction rates (Nqeno et al., 2011). Barriers to effective market participation (Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014); and overstocked and overgrazed rangelands due to contested and dysfunctional communal grazing institutions (Bennett et al., 2013) exacerbate the problem. Sikwela and Mushunje (2013) attribute the lack of market opportunities to the dissolution of the former Bantustan Agricultural Development Corporations at the end of apartheid and a failure to replace them.

Cattle marketing into the formal sector in South Africa mainly involves commercial feedlots, which account for 75 per cent of the beef slaughtered through formal channels in South Africa (Chingala et al., 2017), estimated at 1.4 million cattle annually. However, until recently, commercial feedlots in the Eastern Cape were limited in number, hence smallholder and emergent farmers were typically excluded from formal marketing channels. In response to the livestock marketing challenge in the Eastern Cape, the Eastern Cape Red Meat Project was introduced in 2005 steered by ConMark Trust (ConMark, 2013). Subsequently, the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) took over the project in 2009 through a national initiative called the National Red Meat Development Programme (NRMDP) and has

[6]Elliot is a town in Sakhiziwe Local Municipality, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

since established 10 communal CFPs and one commercial CFP within the Eastern Cape (Sotsha et al., 2017).

A CFP is defined as an agricultural activity '…established to specialize in finishing farmers' cattle, especially in communal areas, on a fixed fee service basis' (Ntombela et al., 2013: 4). According to Marandure et al. (2016), a CFP acts as a centre that manages and finishes cattle using subsidized, commercial feed prior to marketing on behalf of the farmers. The main objective is to enhance formal market participation of emerging and smallholder farmers by improving live body weight and carcass quality of cattle and providing market information and infrastructure on a collective basis (Ngetu, 2013).

Emergent farmer categories

Ikhephu CFP, is a commercially – focused enterprise supporting cattle farmers who have accessed freehold farmland through the agrarian reform process and private purchase. It is located in Elliot in Eastern Cape Province and operated under IASC, established in 2009. The cattle farmers utilising Ikhephu CFP are clustered into five primary cooperatives, which all subscribe to IASC. Ikhephu CFP serves 155 'emergent' farmers with farm holdings amounting to some 64,000 hectares in total area, of which 10,000 hectares are arable. It has a capacity of 500 animals and started operating in 2014 on a 126 – hectare municipal plot. Ikhephu CFP enforces age restrictions at intake, only accepting weaner steers of about 150 – 180 kg live – weight, with a view to them reaching a target market weight of 350 – 400 kg within 90 to 120 days.

After accessing land and becoming part of IASC, overall herd size amongst the 155 IASC farmers increased from a mean of just 25 cattle per farmer to a mean of 60 cattle per farmer. However, a closer look at the distribution of cattle indicates that 25 per cent of farmers still owned less than 25 cattle, 55 per cent owned less than 50 cattle, and over 80 per cent owned less than 100 cattle reared on less than 500 hectares (Table 1). Table 1 also indicates that owners of larger cattle herds also generally had larger farms.

Table 1: Cattle and land ownership for farmers under IASC, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa in 2016 (n = 155).

Metric	**Cattle Ownership**				
	0-50	**51-100**	**101-150**	**>150**	**Totals**
Number of farmers (*n=155*)	86	39	19	11	**155**
Total cattle	2448	2789	2341	1709	**9287**
Mean cattle (±SEM)	29 ± 1.5	72±2.1	123±3.3	213±28	**60±4.3**
Min-max cattle numbers	0-50	51-100	102-150	162-398	
Mean land size in cattle ownership category (hectares)	325	489	603	664	**419±21.7**

Membership of IASC also enabled cattle farmers to benefit from support programmes sourced and channelled through the cooperative such as the Livestock Improvement Scheme (LIS), Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (AsgiSA) programme and the Abroad Spectrum Trading (AST) programme which distributed Bonsmara, Brahman, Angus and Drakensberger cattle on a loan basis. Several cattle farmers also made effective use of the CFP to sell cattle commercially. We analysed how the farmers engaged with the CFP in 2016 and categorised them based on this.

IASC records indicated that from January to December 2016, Ikhephu CFP sold 409 animals, generating over ZAR2.7 million (US$207,900) (IASC progress report 2016, unpublished), equivalent to an average sales value of ZAR6,680 (US$514) per animal. However, a deeper analysis of the sales data demonstrate that the 409 cattle sold belonged to just 55 different farmers out of the 155 livestock farmers who are affiliated to the CFP. Furthermore, of these 55 farmers, just 13 sold 246 of the cattle, underlining how only a relatively small number of more commercially – focused livestock farmers are responsible for most of the sales. The emergent farmers interviewed at Ikhephu could be organized into three broad categories based on the dynamics of their accumulation and production, that is, a combination of how they accessed their land, the number of cattle they sold and their access to different support mechanisms (Table 2).

Table 2: Key characteristics of identified farmer categories under IASC, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa in 2016 (n = 60).

Metric	**Category 1 (n = 43)**	**Category 2 (n = 12)**	**Category 3 (n = 5)**
Land holding range	10 – 379 hectares	349 – 510 hectares	491 – 1600 hectares
Mean cattle sales	3 cattle annum^{-1}	16 cattle annum^{-1}	27 cattle annum^{-1}
Gender ratio	32 male: 11 female	10 male: 2 female	5 male: 0 female
Main income source	Social grants primarily pensions, HIV-aids grants, Old age grants, Child support grants	Cattle sales and social grants, primarily pensions and old age grants	Cattle sales and non-farm income from other businesses
Land access mode	Land reform through government grants, as individuals or groups	A combination of land reform government grants and personal purchase, as groups or as individuals	Multiple farms accessed using non-agricultural funds. At least one farm accessed through land reform government grants
Access to cattle support programmes	Limited access	Some access	Access to multiple programmes
Accumulation mode	From below	Primarily from below	From above

Category 1: Subsistence farmers on private farms

This first category consisted of 43 farmers who sold a mean of three cattle each in 2016, ranging between 1 and 5 cattle. Their farms had been accessed through the land reform process, either as individuals or as groups using pooled governments grants. Only four of the farmers were initially in group arrangements, but all of these had largely fragmented due to challenges with group dynamics such as conflicts over resource access and use. The farmers in this category hardly marketed cattle; had irregular cattle sales (28 farmers sold only once per year mainly to raise capital to meet immediate household needs); and employed family labour. Most of the farms were not mechanised and had very few working livestock watering dams, with 40 per cent of the farms having no dams at all. Of note is that only three of the 43 farmers in this category had been able to access any of the cattle support programmes that were available. Furthermore, only nine of these farmers had their own means to transport cattle to the market, and 34 of the farmers did not have any prior training or education in agriculture. Most of these farmers were former communal farmers, farm workers and pensioners, who have remained largely subsistence – oriented, with only very limited evidence of petty commodity production, if this occurred at all. These farmers spread risk by keeping active marketing and production linkages with their former communal areas. They all had land parcels in their former communal areas, which they still used to produce crops for home consumption and 32 of them still held livestock in their former communal areas. The typical attributes and production strategies of farmers in this category are exemplified by Farmer X:

Farmer X, a former farm worker, initially accessed her 330 – hectare farm in 2003 as part of a group of ten previously unrelated members who pooled their finances, received matching funds from government and accessed the farm under LRAD. The group collapsed due to severe conflicts over resource use and access, and the other farmers left resulting in farmer X eventually being the only farmer left on the farm. She had 32 crossbred cattle and 68 sheep. The farmer sold two cattle and eight sheep in 2016, to repair a broken – down cart and pay school fees for two children. The farmer sold one steer through Ikhephu commercial CFP and one in the communal areas. The farmer hired a vehicle locally for ZAR1,800 (US$139) to transport the animal 35kms from the farm to the CFP. She summarised her situation thus:

> My animals are few, so I do not sell cattle that often. It is not worth it to send animals to Ikhephu CFP, I do not have my own transport and when I hire, the transport is expensive. I sell to my community now. I do not have a house here at the farm, so I stay at my homestead in Ngcobo and come here occasionally. My life is in Ngcobo, life has not changed much for me after getting the farm. The farming business is hard, we have little support. I did not go to school for it, I have grade 12, I use my own experience to farm.

The largest proportion of household income is from grants, and occasional income from maize sales. Farmer X did not benefit from any of the locally available livestock support programmes. The partially – fenced farm had one dam which dried up during the drier months and had no fenced cattle camps. She hired a tractor and implements for cultivating 6 hectares of arable land and hired 3 labourers from the communal area during harvesting. Farmer X did not receive any visits from extension or veterinary services in 2016.

Category 2: Small – scale commercial farmers

The second category consisted of 12 farmers who could be classified as small – scale commercial farmers, each selling between 11 and 20 cattle in 2016. These farmers had regular cattle sales averaging 16 cattle per annum and derived a much larger proportion of their incomes from these sales. A few of them were able to permanently employ an average of two farm labourers, and most also hired additional labour from the communal areas during peak labour demand periods. Three of the farmers were in former group arrangements, through pooled matching funds under LRAD, the groups having collapsed for various reasons. Four of the farmers had purchased their farms, using personal capital from either their pension packages or loans, and the other five had accessed the farms as individuals under government LRAD grants. It can be noted that even though the former had purchased farms using their pensions or loans, and might be thought of as ‘urban investors’, they were still practising subsistence farming in their communal areas whilst employed, and hence essentially ‘emerged’ into small – scale commercial farming from a communal background. Most of the farms were moderately mechanised but had only a few functional livestock dams, most of which dried up during the dry season. Four of the farmers had joined cattle loan programmes but were struggling to repay the loans. Half of the farmers had their own vehicles to transport livestock to the market, the rest relied on hiring them. These farmers all marketed both formally through Ikhephu CFP and informally in their former communal areas. Two of the farmers possessed professional agricultural qualifications, and two had attended livestock production courses. This category consisted of seven former communal farmers, three pensioners and two people who were currently employed, one in teaching and the other in the roadworks department. Farmers in this category are typified by farmer Y:

Farmer Y, who previously farmed in the communal areas and worked as a civil servant, upon retiring used his pension and multiple loans to purchase his farm for ZAR900,000 (US$69,300), and buy additional cattle. He regularly sold cattle and sheep in both the formal and informal sector, to meet his loan repayments, leaving very little to reinvest in agricultural reproduction. In 2016, he had 78 cattle, 564 sheep and 52 goats on the 418 – hectare, partially fenced farm. The farmer had accessed 22 Bonsmara cattle through a ZAR100,000 (US$7,700) NERPO (National Emergent Red Meat Producers Organization) loan, nine Drakensberger cattle through the AST cattle programme loan, had a vehicle loan from West Bank and a tractor loan from the Land Bank. He summarised the problems he had with trying to raise sufficient capital from livestock sales, thus:

> Most of the livestock income goes on servicing the loans. Since I am paying a farm loan, which increased the cost of the farm to almost ZAR2 million (US$154,000) due to interest, and a cattle loan, I am left with very little income for implements. I therefore also had to get a vehicle and tractor loan to expand productivity, hence I have more loans to pay off. We survive on my wife's salary.

The farmer produced rain – fed maize from 22 hectares for livestock feed, the rest of the arable land being infested with invasive black wattle (Acacia mearnsii). The farmer raised ZAR191,200 (US$14,722) from 13 cattle and 51 sheep sold in 2016 to help service the ZAR150,000 (US$11,550) quarterly loan payment, pay school fees and purchase farm implements and inputs. Livestock marketing was difficult for farmer Y due to the dilapidated dirt road, which connected the farm with the main tarred road into Elliot. This stretch of 9 kms of track which the farmer had constructed at his own cost (having purchased the farm without road access), was mostly inaccessible during the rainy season. The farmer had two tractors, several implements for ploughing and planting and a vehicle, on a farm equipped with three functional dams. Farmer Y employed three permanent labourers and utilised additional labour from his former communal area during peak periods. Farmer Y continued to have strong links with his former communal area producing maize (mainly for subsistence) on 10 hectares and holding some cattle there, most of which were crossbreds inherited from his mother. The farmer also utilised the shearing shed in his former communal area to shear the sheep from his farm, as he could not afford a shearing shed and equipment on the farm. Farmer Y had no formal training in agriculture, relying solely on the experience he had accumulated as a communal farmer.

Category 3: Fully commercialised farmers

The third category comprised five fully – commercialised, large – scale farmers who sold between 21 and 30 cattle each in 2016, averaged at 27 cattle each. All the farmers in this category had access to more than one farm, three of the farmers owning three farms each, with at least one of the farms having been accessed through a government LRAD grant. The farmers were involved in other businesses outside agriculture such as real estate, consultancy, transport and funeral insurance and effectively constituted 'investor' farmers. These farmers frequently sold cattle to the commercial CFP. Two of the farmers were stud breeders of specified breeds in South Africa, possessing state of the art equipment at their farms. The farmers permanently employed between three to ten farm labourers at each of their farms and had mean herds of 150 cattle each. These farmers had at some point occupied influential positions in their respective cooperative committees and had managed to access all of the government support programmes available, providing cattle and farm implements on farms which had multiple working dams. All these farmers were business people, for whom farming constituted only a fraction of their income portfolio. The farmers seemed to be well connected socially and politically and also had access to loans from financial institutions. This category was exemplified by farmer Z:

Farmer Z had three farms: two farms of 280 hectares and 700 hectares each, had been purchased privately, and one 370 – hectare farm had been accessed through an LRAD government grant. These farms, which all have at – least 4 functional dams each are highly specialised in terms of different forms of commercial production: the 280 – hectare farm holds 19 Bonsmara bulls and 230 Dohne Merino – crossed sheep; the 700 – hectare farm has 261 Bonsmara female and weaner cattle and 200 Mutton Merino sheep; and the 370 – hectare farm is retained predominantly for maize production, achieving a yield of 10t/ha in 2016. Following a vaccination, breeding and feed supplementation programme, the farmer sold 25 older cattle, 84 weaner cattle and 56 sheep in 2016, through both the formal and informal markets. The farmer was also involved in the funeral insurance business and augmented his income by buying specialised sheep breeds from breeders and reselling in various markets, in addition to income from sheep and wool sales from the farms. As a former Ikhephu CFP board member, he benefitted from 11 cattle provided through the AST programme, 30 cattle from the AsgiSA programme, 30 cattle from the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) Nguni programme, fencing and equipment from Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR) and ZAR270,000 (US$20,790) from the Biomass Fodder Production Assistance Programme. The farmer had access to loans if required but did not find the need to apply for one. The farmer has strategic connections with local government and commercial farmers, underlined when he suggested:

> Knowing people is very important. I have managed to get into most programmes because I know people, and they call me when something comes up. We have a group of five commercial farmers and we bulk our cattle weaners together, and we sometimes buy from other farmers to make 500 weaners that we sell in one go. We were able to get free transport and good price deal from the abattoir. We do this every three months, so I use money from my other business to buy my contribution of weaners to the group, and I make a tidy profit.

The farmer was educated up to grade 12 and invested in various specialised courses such as Dohne Merino sheep production and cattle breeding courses in colleges in Veedersburg, Ventersdorp, Bloemfontein and Sutterheim, and at Dohne Private Farming College. The farmer has also received livestock training through his primary cooperative, Cicirha Ntungele.

Prospects and challenges for emergent smallholder livestock development in South Africa

The case material underlines the considerable class differentiation that currently characterises emergent farmers in South Africa. Indeed, the three categories of emergent livestock farmers that are identified through the analysis are representative of the entire subsistence to commercial production spectrum, highlighting the lack of clarity currently being shown by policy makers in the application of the 'emergent' farmer label.

In the case material, by far the majority of farmers remained at a subsistence – level, even though they now had access to private farmland as part of agrarian reform. Despite the move from a communal to a private farming system there was no overall evidence of a change in production strategy associated with this through a recognisable shift to petty commodity production or small – scale capitalism. Post – resettlement support has largely failed to make a meaningful impact on this category of farmers (e.g., AsgiSA-EC, 2014; Cousins, 2013; Sikwela and Mushunje, 2013). Difficult group dynamics in controlling management and use of natural resources (Lahiff, 2007), dilapidated roads, poor extension service access (Aliber and Hall, 2012) and lack of access to finance challenge the productivity of these farmers. Hall (2009) concluded that less than 1 in 20 land reform beneficiaries benefitted from Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) or Micro – Agricultural Financial Institution of South Africa (MAFISA) loans. Most of these farmers also remain excluded from livestock support programmes and hence still possess low – yielding, crossbred animals, which realise lower prices in the current red meat classification system (Chingala et al., 2017). A lack of functioning grazing camps and livestock dams further curtails their production potential. The failure of these farmers to make the transition to commercial production helps to explain why so much of the redistributed farmland in South Africa has been classified as 'no longer productive' (Africa Research Institute, 2013; DPME, 2013; O'Laughlin et al., 2013). Similar findings of 'underutilisation' of land reform farms have been reported in Zimbabwe by Marongwe (2011).

These farmers spread risk by continuing to draw strongly on their connections with the communal areas from which they originated. Communal areas provide a suitable market for the produce they are occasionally able to sell. The lack of essential equipment such as tractors, means that they cannot make effective use of the relatively large arable land areas available on their farms. Therefore, most of these farmers continue to undertake crop production in the communal fields in their home villages, where they can utilise draught power and engage friends and relatives in seasonal labour arrangements. Owing to the '…limited resources and skills to operate a market – oriented production system…" (DAFF, 2018: vi), some of these farmers are reluctant or simply unable to make the shift to a more capitalist production model and have to remain at a largely subsistence level, barely accumulating. We conclude that the inability of this category of farmers to transition to a consistent form of commercial production means that, despite being land reform beneficiaries, they cannot be considered as genuinely 'emergent' farmers.

However, the analysis did identify a relatively small group of farmers who are accumulating from below to make the transition from communal subsistence into small/medium – scale commercial production. This 'middle' category consists of farmers who emerged from rural areas, using either state assistance or capital from urban jobs to purchase their farms. However, even those who purchased farms using capital accumulated through urban employment were former communal farmers who had unsuccessfully applied for state assistance with farm purchase under agrarian reform. These farmers produced above subsistence and marketed excess product regularly while employing external labour, characteristic of small/medium – scale capitalist farmers (Cousins, 2010). This group most closely approximates to the 'missing middle' referred to by Hall (2009), Neven et al. (2009) and Poulton et al. (2008) in SSA. They also meet the criteria for classification as emergent farmers, having 'emerged' from communal petty commodity production (Aliber and Hall, 2012; Cousins, 2010) into varying levels of capitalist production on land reform farms. If properly supported, this emergent farmer group has the potential to effectively bridge the dichotomy in South African agriculture. However, many of these farmers face real challenges in producing to scale due to limited access to knowledge, finance and support programmes. Particularly important for this group, is a lack of available financial capital, the farmers having to draw on their own limited capital or loans resulting in debt. These challenges have also been identified by Marongwe (2011: 1070), who reported that aspirant black farmers in Zimbabwe '…lacked sufficient capital to invest meaningfully in commercial agriculture, did not have relevant farming experience, and were unable to put the bulk of their land into production for several years'. Due to the challenges they face, some of these farmers also spread risk by continuing to engage with their former communal areas.

The case material also identifies a small number of fully – commercialised, large scale capitalist farmers accumulating from above and using business capital to do this. The existence of these black capitalist farmers (Hall and Kepe, 2017) is supported by published studies from other parts of Southern Africa (e.g., Jayne et al., 2015). However, they cannot be considered as genuine, 'emergent' farmers as they are not emerging from one class system into another, but rather are capitalist entrepreneurs (Kay, 2015; Tilzey, 2017) investing capital in an alternative enterprise. They do, nonetheless, seem to be well – positioned politically and socially for 'elite capture' of the support schemes available to all 'emergent' farmers and to also continue to qualify for access to farms on this basis. The fact that they are not representative of emergent farmers and certainly do not constitute the rural poor, raises questions about the extent to which they should actually be entitled to any of this support at all.

Many of the challenges highlighted by the case study material find resonance with those extensively documented by other authors (Aliber and Hall, 2012; Atuahene, 2011; Bradstock, 2005; Lahiff, 2016; Macleod et al., 2008). Current policy acknowledges the skewed, uncoordinated, inadequate, inefficient and ineffective support afforded to emergent farmers in South Africa (DAFF, 2018). Increasing and sustaining an effective emergent farmer category in South Africa will be difficult within the current agrarian reform approach, which helps to perpetuate elite capture of resources and support services at one end and reinforces subsistence production at the other. In effect, the dualism within South African agriculture that agrarian reform sought to address remains largely intact. Indeed, the latest draft policy on farmer development support (DAFF, 2018), suggests a move away from the term 'emergent' farmer and instead classifies farmers according to production capacity and annual financial turnover. Critically, this new policy maintains a requirement for farmers to have co – financing in order to access support, which might serve to continue to exclude poorer farmers and reinforce their difficulty in transitioning to effective petty commodity production. Agrarian reform programmes need re – aligning more radically with a much clearer focus on enabling farmers who have accessed land to 'emerge' effectively into small/medium – scale capitalist production and on supporting those few farmers who are already there more effectively, that is, to create and perpetuate the 'middle' group of small – scale producers who still remain largely absent from the farming system.

How to effectively support the clearly large number of 'subsistent' farmers who, despite having access to land, have little ability to engage in effective petty commodity production remains a major challenge. One important step to address here in trying to encourage any transition into the 'middle' might involve creating a comprehensive inventory of who these farmers are, what their challenges are and the knowledge gaps that characterise them. The current government proposal that all 'producers' be centrally registered and identified by a unique producer registration number (DAFF, 2018), might be a useful step in creating the database of smallholder producers that is currently lacking (Jacobs et al., 2003; Valente, 2009). This can then be used to try and target support to them more effectively.

For the relatively smaller group of farmers who are already in the 'emergent', middle group, policy may need to focus on better enabling them to service the debts they have often accumulated in making the transition. This might take the form of government or private sector co – financing to provide capital for production especially for those farmers who purchased farms and are left with inadequate funds for production. Improved access to support programmes and addressing critical knowledge gaps might also help to sustain this group.

For the fully – commercialised investor farmers, it might not be a case of how best to support them (the standard mechanisms that any commercial farmer has access to can do this, for example, business loans from banks), but rather how to limit their ability to access the support mechanism that are currently available to all 'emergent' farmers. The South African government is clearly aware of this 'double –dipping' but at present it does not seem to have a clear way of preventing it (DAFF, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

Current agrarian reform approaches in South Africa treat all land reform beneficiaries as a homogenous group of 'emergent' farmers and are not conducive to supporting farmers who, in reality are often at very different stages in the transition to commercial production. Our analysis suggests that in the smallholder cattle sector, three categories of farmers are apparent but only one is really representative of the transition to commercial production that an 'emergent' farmer should demonstrate. This small group has emerged from communal petty commodity to small/medium – scale capitalist commercial production, through accumulation from below and probably most closely approximates to the ‘missing middle’ that scholars have argued is vital in bridging the subsistence – commercial divide. The other two groups consist of the larger fraction of farmers who remain largely subsistence – oriented at one end and an elite group of already – commercialised investors accumulating from above at the other end. Both of the latter groups show no evidence of ‘emergence’, and we conclude that the term ‘emergent’ farmer is thus misplaced for the majority of land reform beneficiaries in South Africa. The term has limited utility not only because it fails to focus support on those who most need it in making the transition to the ‘middle’, but also because it fails to define when and how an emergent farmer ceases to be ‘emergent’. This is facilitating the continued capture of resources by an already commercialised elite who are able to benefit from agrarian reform through land access and associated support, as ‘emergent farmers’. We suggest that the adoption of a much clearer definition of an emergent farmer, will help to focus policy more effectively on supporting those who are genuinely ‘emerging’ into the middle ground of small – scale commercial production. Importantly, if this definition is to effectively support the transition of subsistence farmers to commercial production, it should recognise not only the aspects of production and financial turnover that are currently being mooted but also acknowledge the class from which these farmers have emerged.

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Lovemore C. Gwiriri (corresponding author: gwiriril@coventry.ac.uk; luvgwiriri@yahoo.com) is a research fellow at CAWR, Coventry University, UK. He researches livestock systems resilience, decentralized institutions and agrarian reform. He authored several articles and is a recipient of the Netherlands Nuffic fellowship and a CAWR PhD scholarship.

James Bennett (apy073@coventry.ac.uk) is a Senior Lecturer at CAWR, Coventry University, UK. His research focuses on common property institutions, rangeland management and production, agrarian reform and smallholder livestock production. He has published numerous articles in this field and was previously Editor – in – Chief of African Journal of Range and Forage Science.

Cletos Mapiye (cmapiye@sun.ac.za) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Animal Science at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Cletos employs a farm – to – fork research approach to sustainable meat production and quality. Cletos published over 85 articles, a book chapter and several conference proceedings. He is a recipient of TWAS – SAREP Prize 2017.

Sara Burbi (ab9735@coventry.ac.uk) is as a veterinary surgeon and Course Director of the MSc 'Agroecology, Water and Food Sovereignty' at CAWR, Coventry University, UK. She is well published, and her research is centred on livestock agroecology, multi – actor knowledge co – creation and farm economics to facilitate resilient farming systems.