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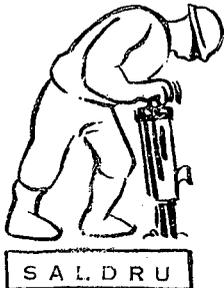
SALDRU FARM LABOUR CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 1976

Paper No. 51

Changes in Farm Labour in the Elgin District

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The twentieth century has seen an ever greater flow of rural workers to urban centres, particularly in Europe and North America. The level of agricultural production in these countries points up that the reciprocal facet of urbanization has been the increased mechanization of farming, and the greater efficiency of farm production of all types. In North America, for instance, as economists point out, that although

many make the mistake of thinking of farming as a backward business, statistical records show that productivity in agriculture has increased at a pace even faster than in industry.
(Samuelson & Scott 1968:452)

In the area examined in this paper; apple-farming in Elgin, Cape, it will be seen that a similar process has occurred; numerous changes in techniques have expanded production possibility enormously, and this has had a number of effects. Apple-farming has now far more the nature of an industry rather than an agricultural pursuit, (at least the traditional conception of agriculture). There has been the tendency for the emergence of a separate management class, with professional qualifications in agriculture and commerce. Simultaneously apple farmers have shifted from being mainly primary producers to an increasing involvement with the marketing aspects of apple production. Along with the growth of this increasingly commercial ethos, has been the inevitable tendency to view farm workers as impersonal labour units. This is also due to the convergence of two other factors; an increasing need for labour with the expansion of production, and the steady replacement of Coloured workers living on the farm with African migrant workers. From the workers point of view, their wages, and working conditions at least during the period of this study, January - February and March of 1973 were the subject of a great deal of resentment. It was quite clear too that management was conscious of this. On one hand farmers were keen to know ways of improving their rates of re-recruitment of migrant workers, so as to have as far as possible, a labour force familiar with farm tasks and routine. However in giving me figures on the rates paid for labour, some expressed the idea that morally perhaps

/the

wages should be increased the reasons mitigating against this were expressed in terms of economic or market forces, e.g. the need for capital investment on the farm. When the Durban strikes occurred during the time of the study, the farmers expressed reservations about my continuing interviews with the migrants (which was usually done on weekends) and in two cases permission to interview migrants in the compounds was withdrawn lest it should lead to unrest. There were also other indications, such as discussions of how wage increases or incentive bonus schemes might best be instituted without disruption, which suggested an awareness of an unsatisfactory wage structure.

Changes in Technology

It is relevant to look at the changes in the technology of apple-farming since it provides a background picture of the tasks in which labour is employed, but also of the host of concerns with which the farmer deals, of which labour is only one element.

Many innovations have taken place in apple-farming with the last ten to twenty years, and these centre around density of planting in orchards, different methods of training and trellising trees, grafting of trees and selection of apple varieties; irrigation systems and use of chemicals. In the marketing aspect changes include the streamlining of packshed operations, the increasing use of cold stores and the introduction of processed products. These changes have allowed apple-farming to now be firmly geared to an export market. Of the changes, increased density of planting has been foremost in increasing yield, frequently doubling the yield per unit area. Traditionally the number of trees per morgen was 180 to 240. The widely spaced plantings have been replaced by more closely planted double rows separated by only a small gap for tractor access; and some farms have as many as 500 trees per morgen. The production figures for one farm in the sample provides an example of the increased yield to which denser planting has contributed.

1958: 16 000	1965: 52 700	1971: 134 000	1975: 175 000
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Table I. Apple production in cartons for one large farm from 1958-19

This dramatic expansion in yields is obviously not solely due to density of planting but also the development of new orchards from scrub land or forest. Yields of individual trees have also increased. Trees are now trained in a variety of ways. Instead of the natural 'bush' shape, they are trellised in a more flattened vertical plane, and the tree height is limited to allow easier access and quicker picking, so that labour can be used more efficiently. These techniques also mean that trees are fruit-bearing at a far younger age and has a more productive life span.

Older orchards of less popular varieties, or those less profitable have been changed by grafting techniques, and are still taking place, so in some orchards trees may be seen bearing two different varieties of apple. The change in varieties grown takes into account which varieties bear earlier or later so that the need for labour can be balanced over the picking season. As well the cold storage performance of different varieties, given the growth of the export market, must be taken into consideration.

Recent advances in insecticides and other chemical sprays which alter the maturation rate of the fruit have also contributed to yields, allowing the sequential maturation of different orchards so as to avoid loss of fruit to windfalls, as well as insect pests. Apart from cutting windfall losses, these factors mean a farmer can use a smaller labour force for a slightly longer period of time. Traditional methods of pruning and thinning are also important in ensuring a good crop. Traditionally Coloured men and women were employed in pruning and thinning, both tasks regarded as requiring training and skill. Pruning the tree is done in July or August, and traditionally was done by groups of Coloured men and women from Genadendal or other neighbouring areas working on a casual basis.

Thinning is the stripping of excess fruit from trees while the fruit is still at berry size, ensuring that no branches are overladen, and that all the remaining berries will develop to fruit of a reasonable size. The degree of thinning practised is something of a reflection of management skill.

/Excess ...

Excess thinning will deplete final crop. Too little thinning may mean that a picking team will have to go through an orchard two or three times since on the earlier rounds, not all the apples are big enough or ripe for picking, and perhaps a smaller number of A grade size apples. Apples sold to the Deciduous Fruit Board are graded and priced according to size.

As has been mentioned, certain varieties are more popular with consumers than others, which will affect their price. But the decisions are more complex. Winter pomaines, for instance, may fetch a lower price than Golden Delicious, but give a higher yield of good sized apples per tree, be less susceptible to windfall loss and bruising, and be quicker to pick. One manager who looked askance at his neighbour's thinning practices was similarly aggressive in this regard, and a wall of his office was devoted to graphs showing the quantities, production costs and income for different varieties in different orchards.

Irrigation techniques are also a matter of debate for farmers. Firstly there has been a great increase in the construction of dams in the area, and a 1964 Stellenbosch report suggested that "the district is probably more advanced in private water conservation and utilization than any other in South Africa". (van Walsem n.d.:2). The construction of dams is obviously an important part of the capital cost structure. Much of the debate among farmers at the time of the study centred around the merits and costs of different types of irrigation systems. The more widely used system involved the use of sprinklers fed through moveable 100 foot lengths of steel piping. This requires a gang of men moving the piping and sprinkler from area to area during the day; and concern centred around wastage of water through evaporation inherent in the sprinkler system; and the use of labour. While an irrigation team may be responsible for a number of systems, they are rarely kept continuously busy, but the amount of free time would not be sufficient for them to be transferred to some other task. The alternative newer irrigation system is the use of permanently installed plastic pipes with 'drip' irrigation. The disadvantages are the cost of going over to another system, and that

the fine nozzles may be blocked by silt in the water, and thus become troublesome to maintain. Nevertheless the system is gaining in popularity and the trend is towards labour-saving installations.

Further important changes have taken place in packing, storage and processing, so that indirectly farmers are more concerned with marketing. This has come about partly through an increase in the scale of production, and also the amalgamation of small farms into larger units more efficient for purposes of management. While small ex farms sell their output to co-operative packsheds, larger farms have their own packsheds, and more recently cold stores. The packshed allows a farm to control its own marketing of fruit produced in excess of the quota sold to the Fruit Board, while cold stores may assist in this as well as selling to the Board at a more favourable time. In the marketing of a seasonable perishable product the advantages of cold stores are obvious, since apples are as fresh after several months as the day they were stored. They have been an important factor in overseas marketing.

At the time of the study in 1972, an estimated 70% or 9,1 million trays of South Africa's apples were exported. Of this figure the Elgin valley and the neighbouring Vyeboom area together produced 5.3 million trays. While this was an increase over the previous year, the price paid to the farmer by the Deciduous Fruit Board dropped from R2,78 to R2,45 per 40lb carton - bearing out the observation by Gregory King, the 17th century English economist that farmers as a whole received less total revenue when the harvest was good than when it was bad. The DFB which is the sole export marketing body, and run on a profit sharing basis with farmers, has cold store facilities in England, Scandanavia, Holland, Belgium and Germany. The Board's 1972 report notes that although South Africa's share of the total sales of apples from Southern Hemisphere suppliers rose in the 1971-72 season,

at the time of the first arrivals the presence of large quantities of competitive cold-stored fruit depressed prices and the market did not really recover until June. Use of cold storage facilities during the season was more extensive than in previous years. (Deciduous Fruit Board Report 1972:7)

À further important innovation in terms of marketing has been

the development of the apple-juice industry. While earlier attempts to set up a cider-making industry were unsuccessful, local imbibing habits being different to those in the West of England, the marketing of a plain and sparkling apple-juice product has been eminently successful, transforming a small area of the valley into an industrial enterprise of some note. The financial arrangements for the necessary capitalization have involved agreements with a large international company. The importance of this development to farmers is that through processing techniques there is now a market for apples that were not formerly saleable, such as 'windfalls', as well as providing a market for any production in excess of market demand at any particular time.

While this discussion of technical innovations might initially appear as peripheral to the problems of farm labour, one might suggest that in many ways these changes are in fact central. They have clearly affected the demand for labour, and the way labour is utilized, as well as the level of skills required. More importantly they affect the conceptual framework of the farmer and the way he regards his labour within this. All these innovations have involved the development of systems of measurement, efficiency and control, conceptual frameworks which are continuously tested against the market world. They have encouraged a separate management class whose ultimate yardstick of performance must be profitability. Labour as a cost factor must inevitably fall into the same framework.

Labour Utilization.

Until the mid-fifties most Elgin farms relied wholly or largely on Coloured labour, for the most part resident on the farms, supplemented by seasonal influxes of labour from nearby Botrivier or Genadendal. The development of the Steenbras dam brought African labour into the area, and during the fifties some Africans began to be employed on farms. As their numbers increased some stayed with their families on the farms, others would return at the end of the season to a rural area. There are still a small number of Africans permanently resident on some of the farms, and one large farm has a separate compound for Africans with the families. With the introduction of various acts of legislation, the number of such resident Africans dwindled, so that all but a few of the Africans employed on the farms are migrants on contract.

The increase of the use of migrant African labour was the result of two factors; the increasing migration of Coloured labourers away from farms to more lucrative jobs in the towns, and the increased demand for labour due to expanded production. Coloured workers, because they are resident and permanent, and thus more familiar with the farm, still form the core of the labour on most farms, but not necessarily the bulk. But they are more likely to hold the positions such as foremen, supervisors, crop sprayers, drivers, machine operators and the like. However, in terms of man-month units, farmers are clearly more dependant on African migrant labour. Of seven large farms surveyed in the area, all but one employed more African migrant labour. The breakdown is given in Table 2 below.

Farm	Coloured			African			Africans as % of total
	men	wom.	tot.	long	short	tot.	
A	1200	450	1650	2650		2650	62%
B	600		600	990	1168	2158	78%
C	600		600		300	300	33%
D	564		564	1054	300	1354	71%
E	276	90	366	312	350	662	65%
F	84	45	129	720		720	82%
G	120		120	198	60	258	68%

Table 2. Labour employed in man/month units; packshed excluded

Inducements to Retain Coloured Labour

There have been very distinct efforts to retain Coloured workers on farms, partly through wages and other facilities. In many cases the standard of housing provided was good (compared with farm housing I have seen in other districts, the standard on some farms was luxurious) and the average worker might find it difficult to obtain equivalent housing if they migrated to Cape Town. Other inducements are farm schools, erected by the farmers but now run by the government, and the provision of creche facilities. These inducements are however something of a double-edged sword from the labourers point of view in tying him to the farm. The need for accommodation

clearly prevents him from leaving, and this feudal like dependency on the farm affects life in other ways. Interviews with farm workers who had moved to the council township of Pineview suggested that they felt a greater freedom, not only to change jobs if necessary, but also just the notion of being away from the pervasive control of farm management.

The provision of creches and clinics also reflects something of benign self-interest on the part of farmers, since it assists with the need for labour in the packsheds during the four-month packing season. Creches ensure that wives and adult daughters, some of whom may themselves be mothers, are available to work in the packsheds. Working at piece rates they can earn up to R20 a week or more, and in that as many as three or four women may come from the same household, it is obvious that such seasonal earnings can dramatically increase a household's purchasing power. On all farms with packsheds, the farm "reserved first rights" on the packing labour of dependants living on the farm. Since however that a woman may be unemployed for the rest of the year, or forced to leave another job, this too can cause resentment.

Nevertheless the provision of such facilities do entail expense and effort on the part of farmers, and are undoubtedly having a positive effect on health and general living standards.

African Migrant Labour

As noted in Table 2, it is clear that the bulk of labour on farms is provided by African migrants, which represents a dramatic change over a relatively short period of time, and one in contradiction to expressed government policy. At one level a system in which labour can be recruited for various lengths of contract up to a year is to some extent tailor-made for the seasonal fluctuations in the demand for labour. While some farms do recruit labour for short periods to meet this demand, many farmers attempt to stagger the contracts, favouring overlapping contract periods of eight months each, with the four month overlap at the seasonal peak. An eight month contract also in part co-incides with the expressed desire of migrants to spend more than two weeks or a month with their families.

Despite the difficulties in language and communication, Africans are generally regarded as good workers, although perhaps on occasion slower (and more careful) than Coloured workers. In addition they

with training they are seen as capable in most aspects of specialized orchard work. An interesting difference lies in the farmers' convictions on this ability. Either pruning or thinning or some task, which differed from farm to farm, is regarded as a more skilled task reserved for Coloured labour. In each case there was one farm which employed Africans for the task, and was pleased with the results.

Where it is feasible, and where speed is necessary, as in picking, farmers have introduced incentive schemes with success. In one case this had resulted in an increase in the amount picked per man per day from 1.8 bins to 4 bins in 1973, while some experienced men might even pick 6 bins. In some cases apple-bruising had risen initially, but since this is penalized if over a certain count, bruising rates usually remain below 2%, an achievement which needs to be seen to be appreciated, since it is all too easy to bump an apple slightly on the path from tree to bin.

Generally both African and Coloured workers work on picking, and incentive systems can double a wage in some cases, changing a R1,05 basic wage to over R2,00 a day. Yet using such an incentive system, one farmer had managed to actually decrease his total cost for the season's picking between 1968 and 1973 while at the same time the crop itself had substantially increased, as had the individual pay packet to each picker.

In terms of the contrast between African and Coloured workers generally, numerous farmers praised the African worker's willingness and reliability. They were not likely to be late or absent after a weekend, a habit attributed to Coloureds, and were far more willing to work overtime. These comments reflect the fierce desire, indeed necessity of the African to save, and their lesser economic security. The prospect of being unable to get a contract at the end of the present one is always real.

In interviewing the migrants themselves, it was clear that there was a strong resentment against the migrant system, and also an expressed dislike of working on farms. They were vocally hostile to the long hours, poor wages and conditions, and almost unanimously stated that they would prefer to work in town. Life in town meant shorter hours, more money, although a few admitted that they might save more working on farms. Most men send home

/between

between R10 and R20 a month, and saving is through an austere life. The chief resentment of the contract system is that it prevents them from seeking or returning to work in town, and many had previously worked in towns. Nevertheless there is some discrepancy between the expressed dislike of farm life and the actual return rate of 75% within the sample. Against the difficulty of getting town contracts and then securing them again, farms may offer certain advantages. Despite the long hours there is a stability and security in the presence of men mainly from one's own area, as well as a freedom from the problems of town life, such as difficulties with transport and police presence. Many of their statements suggested that an important factor in farm contracts was the opportunity of spending a reasonable period at home with their families and then returning to the same job, while town jobs would generally reduce this home time to a minimum.

In general the stated dissatisfaction with farm life may rest with a broad set of factors including wages and living conditions. As one middle-aged man told me, "Here there are three types of people; the White people who are on top, then there are the Coloured people, they are second class, and then there are we Black people, and we are third class". It was not so much the content of the statement which was arresting, but the vehemence of the delivery. Certainly Africans resent the fact that better paid jobs are reserved for Coloured workers, and that frequently their living quarters were cramped and inadequate, and had washroom and kitchen facilities which could withstand improvement. Although admittedly the period of this survey was too short, and under relatively difficult circumstances, given the occurrence of the Durban strikes, to assess accurately what migrants wanted other than the abolition of the migrant contract system. Nevertheless there appeared to be something of a discrepancy in terms of efforts to improve migrant facilities and the increased labour percentage that they represent to farmers.

Table 3. Coloured Farm Wages compared for three farms.

Job Description	No. of Employees/Job rate/ Farm		
'Key men', stores buyer, top line sprayers, supervisor.	Packshed manager nurse) R175+	5@ R150-R200 per month	2@ R100 per month
mechanic	1@ R150 per month		
Foremen/Operator	5@R80-90 per month.		2 @ R4.50 (=R100+ per day (per month)
Builders/artisans.	1 @ R100 per month	4@ R3-5 per day	1@ R45 per week
Dairyman			1@ R24 per week
Heavy machine drivers, plumber garage boy		11@ R2.50 -3 per day	3@ R4.50, per day 7@ R2,60-3.75 per day
Top drivers, pruners, machine operators, sprayer		10@ R2-2.50 per day	
Pruners/drivers	30@ R1.60-2.60 per day.	6@ R1.50-2.00 per day	
Orchard/general	10@ R1.10-1.60 per day	14@ 1.25-2.00 per day	36 @ R1.40-2.75 per day
Total Employees	47	50	52

Table 4. Facilities for Coloured labourers on farms;

Costs where known.

A

Most houses new. Small A-Frame cost R1600, medium size 3-rooms cost R2,500, Large 4-roomed cost R3,500. Clubs and bands subsidised. Clinic with qualified sister. Judo Club. Rugby Field. School on farm. Pay 50% of uniforms. Saturday lorry to Pick n'Pay in Somerset West. Consumer goods can be purchased through farm at wholesale prices, if saved $\frac{1}{3}$ of price. Social worker on farm. Farm library. Creche. Shop.

B

Houses about 15-20 years old, well maintained. Electricity, firewood ration. School transport for children (to school at Oudebrug). Excellent creche facilities for younger children. Attendance compulsory! Cost to farm R18,000.00 per annum, (including) Clinic, 2/ qualified sisters. Nursery school teachers. Playing field.

C

Houses, old but solid, 3-4 rooms. Some have electricity, supplied on meter. (Farm buys in bulk). Creche during packing and thinning^{Season}. Children given 3 meals a day, cost to farm 45c, charge 4c. Anglican Church school on farm. School room used for community activities, film shows provided, activities include bazaars, plays. Rugby field. Lorry to village on Saturdays. General dealers shop on farm.

Table 5. African Migrants: Rates of Pay and facilities provided, recruitment.

Farm /Recruitment area and method.	Basic wage / re-recruitment rate	Incentives paid	Accommodation	Food /other facilities
<u>A</u> Mqanduli: trader	85c r/r high; farm needs decreasing	picking, pruning average daily rate R1. +long term bonus R15pa.	double bunks, 12 per 22'x12' house	lunch enriched soup + brown bread. Football
<u>B</u> Qala, Qumbu, Pondomies. Headman, Ndamasi, recruits.	95c r/r 50% long-term 20% short.	picking, pruning service bonus 5c p.d., packshed overtime 10c hr	long term: 2 and 4 per room, Short contract: dormitory	lunch enriched soup + brown bread. football, film-shows. beer brewed
<u>C</u> Matatiele: go self, send boss-boys month ahead.	R1.00 r/r 67%	service bonus 10 ¢ per year. Pick: Average R38.50 per month.	41 rondavels. 4 per house.	lunch stew $\frac{1}{4}$ lb meat, pronutro, Kupugani soup. Football jerseys + cup.
<u>D</u> Matatiele: foreman with lorry.	R1.20 R/r 55%	R10 per contract	Rondavels, 5 per room.	lunch bullybeef, beans, +bread. Football.
<u>E</u> Mqanduli: Go self.	R1.10 r/r long term good short fair.	Overtime average to R1.25-35	Dormitories, fair to poor. Building new houses.	lunch enriched soup + sheep offal, bread. Football.
<u>F</u> Willowdale. Bossboys	95c-R1.00 r/r 45%	1st. year +5c 2nd year +15c 3rd year +25-40c	4 beds per room. New clean bldg.	? Football.
<u>G</u>	R1.25-45 r/r 90%	picking 70c day other jobs higher basic.	Rondavels. good.	? Share Oudebrug facilities.

Note: r/r = rate of re-recruitment