

Monitoring the Performance of the South African Labour Market

An overview of the Farm Worker Sector from Quarter 2 of 2008 to Quarter 2 of 2011

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Overview of the Farm Work Sector in South Africa

The agriculture, fishing and forestry industry is one of the key industries in South Africa, directly contributing 2.3 percent to South Africa's GDP. In addition to the direct output contribution, agriculture plays a role as a feeder industry to a host of secondary industries. Farm employment forms the majority of employment within this sector.

Over the past decade, farm employment and consequently agricultural employment have declined quite rapidly. Despite this decline, farm employment remains the leading source of formal employment for poorly educated and low skilled rural workers. Just over half (53.7 percent) of farm workers are located in commercial agricultural areas, while one-fifth (22.1 percent) are in so-called 'tribal areas' – essentially the former homeland areas – as classified by Statistics South Africa). Just under one-quarter (24.3 percent) of farm workers actually reside in urban areas, mainly in the Free State, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng and the Northern Cape (these provinces account for roughly 85 percent of urban-dwelling farm workers).

Lack of credible and organised representa-

tion for farm workers, though, poses a serious challenge: many farm workers still do not enjoy the rights afforded to them by South African labour legislation and are vulnerable to exploitation. Even with the implementation of Sectoral Determination 7, which regulates the sector, enforcement of appropriate working conditions and remuneration is difficult. Given this scenario, securing the rights of farm workers is a complex challenge for policymakers, particularly where workers remain ignorant of their rights.

In that regard, there is anecdotal evidence that farm workers work long hours, are poorly remunerated and have little access to social protection. If the sector is adequately monitored to ensure respect of fair working conditions, it has the potential to make a vital contribution to rural poverty alleviation.

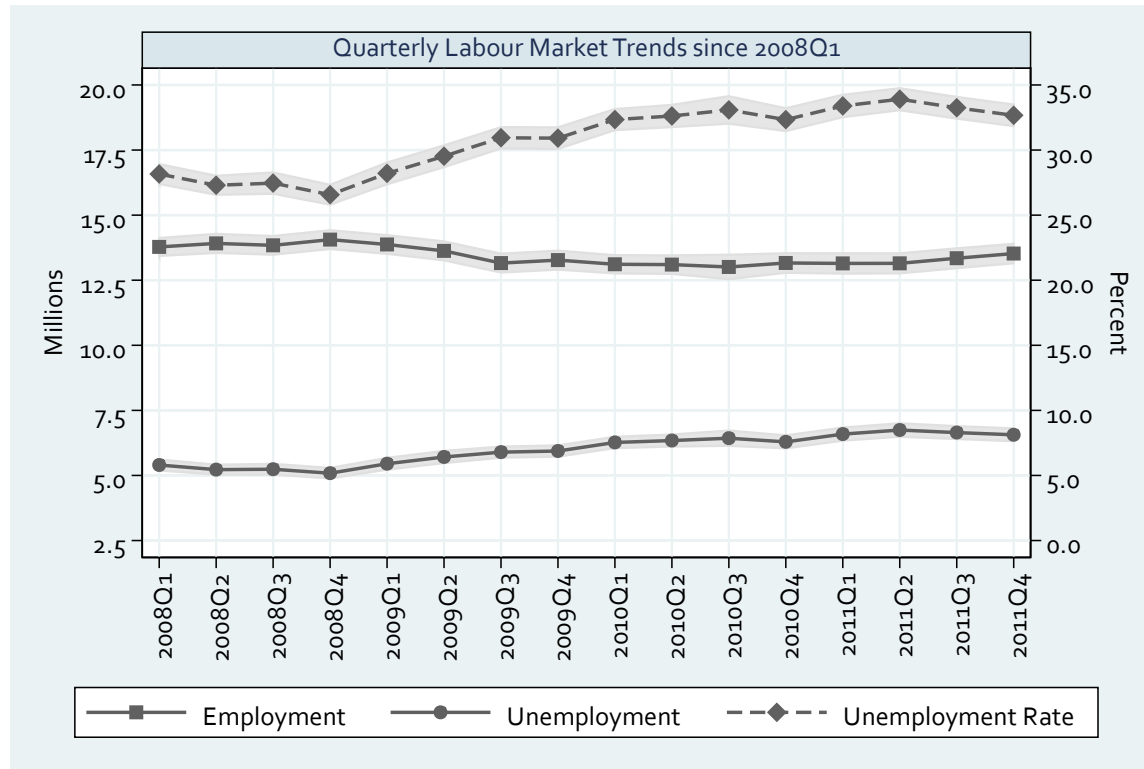
This factsheet aims to provide a brief but insightful picture of the trends and characteristics of farm work employment in South Africa. In doing so, comparisons are made to the greater non-agricultural economy to ascertain differences in employment conditions between farm workers and that of the

average non-agricultural worker within the country. Unfortunately, the QLFS still does not include information on earnings – a critical shortcoming of our current labour market data - limiting the analysis of working conditions in the farm work subsector. Information available in the survey is, however, adequate to allow formulation of an informed hypothesis regarding basic conditions of service and quality of farm employment.

In this factsheet, farm workers are defined to include an employee who is employed mainly in or in connection with farming activities. As employers or self-employed, commercial farm owners are therefore excluded in terms of this definition. All farm workers are located in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry, although the opposite is not true.

Recent Labour Market Trends

Figure 1: Quarterly Estimates of Labour Market Aggregates



Source: (Own calculations, Statistics South Africa (2009, 2010: ; various other years))

- Notes:
1. The expanded definition of unemployment is utilised here.
 2. Shaded bands represent the 95 percent confidence intervals around the estimates.

By mid-2010, the South African economy had emerged from the recession, recording rates of economic growth not seen since 2008Q3. Real GDP grew at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 3.4 percent in 2010Q3, rising to 3.8 percent in the following two quarters (own calculations, South African Reserve Bank 2011). The recovery meant that pre-crisis output levels recorded in 2008Q3 were surpassed in 2010Q2. By 2011Q1, real GDP (seasonally adjusted at annualised rate) was 3.2 percent higher than 2008Q3.

While output's recovery was relatively quick, the situation in the labour market remains dire. The recession was accompanied by a massive shedding of employment: from its peak of 14.1 million in 2008Q4, 900 000 jobs had been lost by 2009Q3 and a further 150 000 jobs were lost over the following year. Employment has since remained stagnant, with little movement in any direction, totalling just over 13.3 million in 2011Q3.

Unemployment – both its level and rate – has risen since early 2009. Expanded unemployment reached 6.6 million in 2011Q3, up nearly 1.6 million since 2008Q4, while the unemployment rate has risen 6.5 percentage points over the same period to reach 33.2 percent. There are indications of labour market improvements, although changes in 2011Q3 are not statistically significant.

A Brief Labour Market Overview

The working age population grew by 1.6 percent per year between 2008 and 2011, while employment contracted by 1.9 percent per year over the same period. This contraction equates to 765 000 jobs lost over the three year period, with the result that the labour absorption rate – the share of employment within the working age population – declined from 44.7 percent to 40.3 percent.

The recession was accompanied by a slight contraction in the narrow labour force: just over half of net job losses translated into growth in narrow unemployment, with the remainder moving into non-searching (broad) unemployment. Discouraged workseekers grew by more than 1.1 million at a rate of 26.8 percent per annum between 2008Q2 and 2011Q2. The bulk of this growth, though, occurred from 2009 onwards and by the end of the period the broadly unemployed numbered more than 6.7 million.

The decline in the size of the narrow labour force means that the narrow labour force participation rate (LFPR) fell nearly four percentage points over the period to 54.2 percent, while the expanded LFPR was barely changed at 60.9 percent. Both narrow and expanded unemployment rates increased over the period, reaching 25.7 percent (+2.7 percentage points) and 33.9 percent (+6.6 percentage points) respectively.

Table 1: Labour Market Overview, 2008 Quarter 2 – 2011 Quarter 2

	2008	2009	2010	2011	Change ('08-'11)	
					Absolute	Relative
Labour Market Aggregates (Thousands)						
Working Age Population	31 105	31 631	32 163	32 652	1 546	1.6 *
Employment	13 913	13 627	13 099	13 148	-765	-1.9 *
Narrow Unemployment	4 140	4 171	4 401	4 538	398	3.1 *
Narrow Labour Force	18 053	17 797	17 500	17 686	-367	-0.7
Expanded Unemployment	5 223	5 708	6 340	6 745	1 522	8.9 *
Expanded Labour Force	19 136	19 335	19 439	19 893	758	1.3
Discouraged Workseekers	1 083	1 538	1 939	2 207	1 124	26.8 *
Labour Force Participation Rate (Percent)						
Narrow LFPR	58.0	56.3	54.4	54.2	-3.9	-2.3 *
Expanded LFPR	61.5	61.1	60.4	60.9	-0.6	-0.3
Unemployment Rate (Percent)						
Narrow Unemployment	22.9	23.4	25.2	25.7	2.7	3.8 *
Expanded Unemployment	27.3	29.5	32.6	33.9	6.6	7.5 *

Source: (Own calculations, Statistics South Africa (2009, 2010)).

Notes: 1. An asterisk denotes statistically significant changes at the 95 percent confidence level, while a dagger (†) denotes statistically significant changes at the 90 percent confidence level.

2. The working age population includes all individuals aged between 15 years and 65 years inclusive.

'Discouraged workseekers grew by more than 1.1 million at a rate of 26.8 percent per annum between 2008Q2 and 2011Q2'

Employment Trends by Industry

Table 2: Employment Trends by Industry, 2008 Quarter 2 – 2011 Quarter 2

	2008	2009	2010	2011	Change ('08-'11)		
					Absolute	Relative	
Total Employment ('000s)	13 913	13 627	13 099	13 148	-765	-1.9	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	797	720	630	599	-198	-9.1	*
<i>of which Farm Work</i>	488	470	479	421	-67	-4.8	
Mining and quarrying	347	325	315	282	-65	-6.7	
Primary Sector	1 142	1 045	945	880	-262	-8.3	*
Manufacturing	2 007	1 925	1 713	1 737	-270	-4.7	*
Electricity, gas and water	100	98	97	93	-7	-2.4	
Construction	1 168	1 150	1 050	1 045	-123	-3.6	
Secondary Sector	3 254	3 173	2 860	2 875	-379	-4.0	*
Wholesale and retail trade	3 143	3 012	2 913	2 948	-194	-2.1	
Transport and communication	797	753	768	777	-21	-0.9	
Financial and business services	1 726	1 763	1 729	1 708	-18	-0.3	
CSP services	2 656	2 696	2 717	2 837	180	2.2	
Private households	1 167	1 182	1 160	1 120	-47	-1.4	
Tertiary Sector	9 382	9 407	9 287	9 390	8	0.0	

Source: (Own calculations, Statistics South Africa (2009, 2010)).

Notes: 1. The expanded definition of unemployment is utilised here in defining the labour force.

2. An asterisk denotes statistically significant changes at the 95 percent confidence level, while a dagger (†) denotes statistically significant changes at the 90 percent confidence level.

The tertiary sector is South Africa's largest source of jobs, employing 9.4 million people or 71.4 percent of total employment in 2011Q2. The primary and secondary sectors account for 6.7 percent and 21.9 percent of total employment respectively.

Employment in the tertiary sector remained virtually unchanged between 2008 and 2011, despite weakness in the wholesale and retail trade sector. In contrast, the primary and secondary sectors saw significant declines in employment over the three-year period. The former contracted at an average annual rate of 8.3 percent, shedding around 260 000 jobs, while the latter lost 380 000 jobs at a rate of 4.0 percent per year. Job losses in these sectors were driven by contractions in agriculture, forestry and fishing (198 000) and manufacturing (270 000).

Agriculture, forestry and fishing accounts for 4.6 percent of total employment in 2011 and roughly two-thirds of primary sector employment. Roughly 420 000 of these jobs are classified as farm workers. Farm workers represent 3.2 percent of total employment in 2011Q2, although this number appears to be declining quite rapidly. Although the change between 2008Q2 and 2011Q2 is not statistically significant, it is estimated that farm workers have declined by 4.8 percent per annum over the period, with important implications for rural communities.

Unfortunately, the small sample size means that the decline in the employment of farm workers of nearly 70 000 observed between 2008 and 2011 is not statistically significant. In terms of the rate of decline, this is more than twice as fast as the decline in total employment, but less than half as fast as the decline in agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Few changes observed by demographic categorisation are found to be statistically significant, although all but one of the observed changes are in a downward direction. The vast majority of farm workers are African (79.8 percent in 2011Q2), with the remainder being Coloured. Two-thirds of the observed employment decline is attributable to Africans. Roughly two-thirds of farm workers are male, a proportion that appears to have increased slightly over the three-year period. Farm workers are typically between the ages of 25 and 44 years and employment within this age group is unchanged from 2008. Just 15 percent of farm workers are under the age of 25 years, down around three percentage points from 2008.

One area where there have been statistically significant changes in employment is education. Employment has declined rapidly amongst those with no education (-13.9 percent per annum) and those with no secondary education (-11.1 percent), a trend in line with the gradual improvement of the educational profile of the general population.

Demographic Employment Trends within the Farm Work subsector

Table 3: Employment of Farm Workers, 2008 Quarter2 – 2011 Quarter 2

	2008	2009	2010	2011	Change ('08-'11)	
					Absolute	Relative
Total Employment	488	470	479	421	-67	-4.8
By Race						
African	381	353	367	336	-44	-4.0
Coloured	98	109	109	82	-17	-6.0
Asian	...	...	...	...	...	...
White	9	8	2	3	-6	-29.9
By Gender						
Male	334	329	303	282	-52	-5.5
Female	155	141	176	139	-15	-3.4
By Age Group						
15 to 24 year olds	89	60	62	63	-25	-10.5
25 to 34 year olds	151	166	173	146	-5	-1.0
35 to 44 year olds	128	143	121	120	-8	-2.2
45 to 54 year olds	75	65	80	65	-10	-4.6
55 to 65 year olds	45	36	43	26	-19	-16.7
By Educational Attainment						
No education	78	84	57	50	-28	-13.9 *
Grades 0 – 7	219	203	197	154	-65	-11.1 *
Grades 8 – 11	151	147	184	176	25	5.2
Grade 12	34	29	28	33	-1	-1.3
Diploma/Certificate	...	...	...	...	...	...
Degree	...	...	...	...	...	...

Source: (Own calculations, Statistics South Africa (2009, 2010)).

Notes: 1. An asterisk denotes statistically significant changes at the 95 percent confidence level.

Table 4: Demographic Composition of Employment among Farm Workers, 2008 Quarter 2 and 2011 Quarter 2

	2008Q2		2011Q2	
	Farm Work	Total Non-Agricultural Economy	Farm Work	Total Non-Agricultural Economy
Total Employment (000s)	488	11 949	421	11 430
By Race				
African	78.0	69.3	* 79.8	69.4
Coloured	20.2	11.3	* 19.4	10.9
Asian	-	3.7	* -	3.9
White	1.9	15.7	* 0.7	15.8
By Gender				
Male	68.4	58.4	* 66.9	57.9
Female	31.6	41.6	* 33.1	42.1
By Age Group				
15 to 24 year olds	18.1	13.0	* 15.1	10.7
25 to 34 year olds	30.9	35.5	34.7	34.3
35 to 44 year olds	26.2	26.0	28.4	28.6
45 to 54 year olds	15.4	17.5	15.5	18.2
55 to 65 year olds	9.3	7.9	6.2	8.2
By Educational Attainment				
No education	16.0	3.0	* 11.8	1.6
Grades 0 – 7	44.7	12.6	* 36.4	10.1
Grades 8 – 11	31.0	31.6	41.9	30.5
Grade 12	6.9	31.7	* 7.7	33.5
Diploma/Certificate	0.1	12.7	* 0.2	14.7
Degree	-	7.2	* -	8.5

Source: (Own calculations, Statistics South Africa (2009, 2010)).

Notes: 1. An asterisk denotes statistically significant differences in share of employment at the 95 percent confidence level

The demographic profile of farm employment differs significantly from that in the non-agricultural economy. Africans and Coloureds are more frequently employed as farm workers compared to their shares of employment in the non-agricultural economy. In 2011Q2, almost four-fifths (79.8 percent) of farm workers were African, compared to 67.9 percent in the non-agricultural economy. Similarly, Coloureds' share of farm work employment is almost twice that of their share in the non-agricultural economy (19.4 percent vs. 10.6 percent).

As noted, farm workers are typically male, outnumbering females by a two-to-one ratio. At 66.9 percent in 2011Q2, the share of men within farm work is almost eight percentage points higher than in the non-agricultural economy. In terms of age, farm work is not that different from the non-agricultural economy. One big difference, though, is the relatively large proportion of farm workers under 25 years, which is roughly 50 percent greater than in the non-agricultural economy (15.1 percent vs. 10.2 percent in 2011Q2). The net effect is that farm workers are typically slightly younger on average, (37.2 years vs. 38.6 years). Educationally, farm workers lag workers in the non-agricultural economy by a significant margin. Close to half (48.2 percent) of farm workers have no secondary education, compared to less than 12 percent in the non-agricultural economy, while matriculation rates are four times higher in the latter.

Employment Characteristics

The current section turns towards the characteristics of employment. Table 5 presents data on the type and duration of employment contracts in the farm work sector and the non-agricultural economy. Since this section deals with employment contracts and benefits, only employees are included in the sample. This has a very minor impact on the size of the farm work sample (a reduction of 3.1 percent in 2008 and even less in 2011) due to the way the farm work sample was originally defined. In contrast, restricting the sample to employees only reduces the non-agricultural economy sample by almost 18 percent in both periods.

There is significant variation in both the duration and nature of employment contracts in these two sectors. Half (50.2 percent) of farm employees are employed on a permanent basis in 2011, compared to 69.1 percent of non-agricultural employees. Limited duration contracts were more common amongst farm employees in 2008, but this difference was not statistically significant in 2011. The uncertain nature of farm work is, though, reflected in the large proportion of employees with contracts of unspecified duration, which was double the share observed in the non-agricultural economy in both years.

Tenure insecurity is often determined by the nature of employment contracts entered into by employers and employees: written contracts are typically viewed as more secure than verbal contracts. In 2011Q2, >>>

Table 5: Contract Characteristics of Farm Worker Sector, 2008 Quarter 2 and 2011 Quarter 2

	2008Q2		2011Q2	
	Farm Work	Total Non-Agricultural Economy	Farm Work	Total Non-Agricultural Economy
Total Employment ('000s)	488	11 949	421	11 430
Total Employees ('000s)	473	9 838	417	9 422
Contract Duration				
Limited duration	17.1	11.8 *	15.6	13.6
Permanent nature	41.0	68.2 *	50.2	69.1 *
Unspecified duration	41.9	20.1 *	34.3	17.3 *
Contract Type				
Written contract	47.8	83.1 *	60.9	87.3 *
Verbal contract	52.2	16.9 *	39.1	12.7 *

Source: (Own calculations, Statistics South Africa (2009, 2010)).

Notes: 1. An asterisk denotes statistically significant differences in share of employment at the 95 percent confidence level.

Table 6: Employment Characteristics within Farm Worker Sector, 2008 Quarter 2 and 2011 Quarter 2

	2008Q2		2011Q2	
	Farm Work	Total Non-Agricultural Economy	Farm Work	Total Non-Agricultural Economy
Total Employees ('000s)	473	9 838	417	9 422
Benefits				
Medical aid	1.2	33.1 *	1.5	36.6 *
UIF contributions	54.4	57.9	59.1	60.2
Pension contributions	8.7	51.9 *	9.5	53.8 *
Paid leave	32.0	63.9 *	37.7	72.3 *
Paid sick leave	-	-	39.7	73.6 *
Paid maternity leave	-	-	16.4	66.5 *
Hours of Work				
1-19 hours per week	1.2	2.1	1.3	1.9
20-39 hours per week	6.4	8.7	3.2	8.7 *
40-44 hours per week	14.1	39.4 *	15.4	43.5 *
45-49 hours per week	39.0	25.8 *	41.8	26.6 *
50+ hours per week	39.3	24.0 *	38.3	19.3 *
Mean hours worked	47.5	45.4 *	47.1	44.3 *
Other				
Trade union membership	-	-	3.7	33.4 *

Source: (Own calculations, Statistics South Africa (2009, 2010)).

- Notes: 1. An asterisk denotes statistically significant differences in share of employment at the 95 percent confidence level.
2. Access to paid maternity leave is calculated as a proportion of the female sample only.

About 60.9 percent of farm workers reported having entered into written employment contracts with their employers, while 39.1 percent had verbal contracts. The picture is substantially different in non-agricultural employment where 87.3 percent of workers have written contracts. The prevalence of written contracts appears to be increasing in both sectors, although the change is far more pronounced amongst farm workers (up 13.1 percentage points over the three-year period, a statistically significant change).

Sectoral Determination 13 was introduced in 2002, extending specific protections to workers in agriculture and affording workers certain minimum rights in addition to regionally differentiated wage minima. Table 6 presents evidence on three sets of variables that, together, provide an indication of the quality of employment in the farm work sector. Not all of the variables presented are regulated by the determination, although employers and employees are able to negotiate on these issues (e.g. medical aid).

Access rates to six types of employment benefits are generally very different between the farm work sector and the non-agricultural economy. Access to medical aid is almost unheard of amongst farm workers, while employers make pension contributions on behalf of fewer than one in ten workers. In contrast, access rates for workers in the non-agricultural economy are 36.6 >>>

percent and 53.8 percent respectively. Farm workers are, however, not disadvantaged in terms of unemployment insurance coverage, with UIF coverage rates averaging roughly 60 percent in both sectors.

Paid leave, irrespective of type, is relatively rare for farm workers. Almost three-quarters (72.3 percent) of workers in the non-agricultural economy report having paid leave in 2011Q2, compared to just 37.7 percent of farm workers. A similar gap exists in the case of paid sick leave. Amongst women, only two in five farm workers report being allowed paid maternity leave, compared to three in four in the non-agricultural economy. Here, it should be noted that this difference is not a function of differing gender compositions of the two sectors as the rates are calculated for women only.

'Overall ... it appears that 'job quality' as proxied by these variables is lower among farm workers than amongst those employed in the non-agricultural economy.'

Overall, there appears to have been a slight improvement in farm workers' access to the six benefits between 2008Q2 and 2011Q2. When considering the change in contract types over the period – specifically the increase in the proportion of farm workers employed on a permanent basis – this may point to the fact that job losses have had a smaller impact amongst permanent employees, who may also enjoy superior access to these benefits.

Table 6 also reports the distribution of employees by the number of hours usually worked per week. Overall, in the non-agricultural economy, the majority of workers report usually working between 40 and 49 hours per week in 2011Q2: 43.5 percent work 40 to 44 hours, while a further 26.6 percent work 45 to 49 hours. Just under one-fifth (19.3 percent) of employees report working 50 or more hours per week, while less than two percent work fewer than 20 hours per week.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that farm workers work long hours, particularly when compared to their counterparts in the non-agricultural economy. This is borne out both in terms of the distribution of individuals across the time categories used above, and in terms of mean hours worked. Close to two-fifths (38.3 percent) of farm workers report usually working 50 hours or more per

week in 2011Q2, almost twice the proportion in the non-agricultural economy. A further 41.8 percent work between 45 and 49 hours per week, 15.2 percentage points higher than in the non-agricultural economy. Thus, 80.1 percent of farm employees work 45 hours or more per week, compared to 45.9 percent of those in the non-agricultural economy. This difference translates into higher mean hours worked in both 2008Q2 and 2011Q2 for farm employees. On average, farm employees reported usually working 47.5 hours per week in 2008, 2.1 hours more than those in the non-agricultural economy. The difference in 2011Q2 is slightly greater than three years, largely due to a slight decline (by one hour) in mean hours worked in the non-agricultural economy.

The final variable of interest is union membership, which provides an indication of the vulnerability of workers to possible exploitation through weak bargaining power. Although no data on union membership was collected in 2008, data for 2011 reveals that union membership is virtually non-existent amongst farm workers. Just 3.7 percent belong to a union, one-ninth the proportion found in the non-agricultural economy. This finding confirms the relatively weak position vis-à-vis employers of farm workers, and points to the importance of having a sectoral determination applicable to the sector.

Overall, therefore, it appears that 'job quality' as proxied by these variables is lower among farm workers than amongst those employed in the non-agricultural economy. In some aspects, such as access to paid leave and mean hours worked, this disadvantage may be worsening over time despite improvements in absolute terms.

Conclusion

Farm work is one of the largest sources of employment for poor rural communities, often faced with limited economic opportunities due to poor education and inadequate skills. Despite concerns about labour practices and working conditions faced by farm workers, farm employment directly and indirectly constitutes a critical source of income in rural communities. Consequently, weakness in farm employment trends threatens the economic well-being of rural communities and may put upward pressure on poverty levels.

In 2011 the agricultural sector employed around 600 000 individuals or about 4.6 percent of total employment. Of these, roughly 420 000 (70 percent) were farm workers. Employment of farm workers was little changed between 2008Q2 and 2011Q2 and it is therefore not surprising that few statisti-

cally significant changes in employment were observed by race, gender or age. However, significant differences were observed amongst workers with no secondary education (i.e. completed primary education or less), with employment declining at double-digit annual rates. This does not necessarily imply an increasing demand for more educated workers in the sector, but is more likely to be the outcome of the gradual aging and exit from employment of older workers with low educational attainment (a trend that is occurring generally in the workforce).

Farm workers are relatively young and are predominantly African and male. Indeed, relative to the non-agricultural economy, farm workers are more likely to be African and male. In terms of educational attainment, farm work is concentrated amongst those without secondary education and fewer than one in ten have completed matric.

The findings above suggest that farm workers are not always able to secure the employment rights to which they are entitled. Their poor education and limited employment alternatives weaken their bargaining power and this is compounded by the almost complete lack of worker organisation in the sector (just four percent belong to a labour union).

Only half of farm workers are employed on permanent contracts, while one-third report contracts of unspecified duration. This is certainly at least partly related to the greater seasonality of employment within farm work when compared to the non-agricultural economy, and translates into greater uncertainty for workers. Closely related to this issue is the type of contract, written or verbal. Written contracts are found to be significantly less common amongst farm workers, with just three in five workers having them, compared to the non-agricultural economy where nine in ten have written contracts.

In terms of the various indicators of 'job quality' presented, farm workers are found to typically lag their counterparts in the non-agricultural economy. In particular, the gap is greatest in terms of employer contributions for medical aid and for pensions. Thus, farm workers are likely to disproportionately rely on the public health system when ill or injured and on the state old age pension once they reach retirement age. This in turn has important implications for the state in terms of its delivery of primary healthcare and social welfare services in rural communities. Less than 40 percent of farm workers report being allowed paid leave or paid sick leave, while just two in five female farm workers receive paid maternity leave. The only exception is UIF coverage, where coverage amongst farm workers is compa-

rable to that of workers in the non-agricultural economy (around 60 percent).

The QLFS data confirms that farm workers typically work longer hours than those in non-agricultural employment: estimates for 2011Q2 show a difference of three hours per week with farm workers averaging 47.1 hours. Nearly 40 percent of farm workers work 50 hours or more, roughly twice the proportion in the non-agricultural economy.

Unfortunately, the lack of wage data in the QLFS means that no analysis of remuneration in the sector can be conducted. The continued lack of wage data in the QLFS represents a serious gap in our understanding of current labour market condition post-2007.

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