

Press Release

For immediate release

22 October 2018



South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

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Crime threat to SA farming community a grave concern – IRR

South Africa's agricultural sector continues to be threatened by a volatile security situation, and it is imperative that the government takes this seriously and acts appropriately.

Agri-SA's recently released report on crimes affecting farms is 'a timely call to appreciate the scale of the criminal threat to the farming sector and to take appropriate action', says IRR project manager Terence Corrigan.

The report – based on a survey of agriculturalists affiliated to Agri-SA's provincial bodies – showed that a shocking 70% of farms had experienced some form of crime in 2017. Stock theft was the most common crime, followed closely by theft of infrastructure and theft of equipment.

Worryingly, some 25% had experienced robbery – a crime that is frequently associated with violence.

The survey also found that a third of respondents claimed an increase in crime over the past three years.

Says Corrigan: 'Agri-SA's survey is an invaluable attempt to quantify the perilous situation under which farming households exist. This applies to all farming communities, farmers, and

their employees, of every race. Too often, voices both in the state and in society – not least the President – have tried to play this down. It deserves to be acknowledged for the very real and debilitating problem it is.’

In addition, he notes, most farmers do not report all the crimes committed to the authorities.

‘The results here suggest a sense of alienation and frustration on the part of many farmers – reporting crime would be a pointless exercise, there is nothing that the police could do, and so on.’

All in all, economic costs of crime in the agricultural sector amount to some R7.7 billion.

The IRR argues that crime directed at farms – whether at property or at people – is a major strategic issue for the agricultural sector. Not only is it imposing very real costs on a sector that is under permanent duress, but it is a major disincentive to choosing a career in farming. If unchecked, this could prove detrimental to the long-term viability of the sector.

‘The IRR has long argued that farm dwellers face an outsized threat,’ says Corrigan. ‘This is backed up by solid analysis. Official data shows that between 2012/13 and 2017/18 there were some 353 farm murders. Agri-SA’s study adds additional weight to this. But less remarked on is what that means for South Africa and the farming economy. Concerns about personal safety and the security of one’s assets will drive people away from the industry, and dissuade others from entering it. The impact, particularly on smaller operators, will be corrosive over time.’

With agriculture’s contribution to the overall national value chain accounting for between 10% and 12% of GDP – again, according to the report – this is something that South Africa can ill afford, Corrigan says.

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