

## The Perceptions and Attitudes of Small-scale Cane Growers' Offspring towards Farming and Implications for Sustainability: A Case Study of Kwazulu Natal North Coast, South Africa

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**ABSTRACT** The inheritance of cane farming by the children of cane farmers is a matter of great concern in Kwazulu Natal Province. This paper seeks to highlight the perceptions of their offspring with regard to taking over when their parents retire from farming. A sample of 193 youth was drawn from 11 527 farmers in order to test their perceptions. A questionnaire was used to collect the information. The study found that 57 percent were males and 43 percent females. 34 percent of the sample were unemployed while 65.6 percent were employed on informally basis. 80 percent believed that farming is profitable but only 52.7 percent believed in cane farming, 45, 6 percent agreed that more money is derived from farming other than from non-farming activities. 76 percent did not agree that agriculture is of low status and 81.3 percent agreed that farming has improved livelihood. In conclusion the paper agreed that 76.7 percent of the youth have positive attitude towards agriculture as opposed to the general expression that youth hate farming. The following recommendation was made, the policy makers should develop policies to support, attract and retain young people toward farming, and exposing them in initiatives that consider the whole value chain in agriculture.

### INTRODUCTION

The inheritance of cane farming by the children of cane farmers is a matter of great concern in Kwazulu Natal Province, because this will devoid sustainability in the small scale farming enterprise. In 2016 a paper was written with the focus in North Cost targeting succession planning which bears reference to this topic (Tshangase et al. 2016). Succession planning need attention. According to the Sugar Industry Directory (2015: 17) there are approximately 22,500 registered growers who produce an average of 19 million tons of sugar per annum. At least 21 110 of these growers are categorised as small scale who deliver about 10 percent of the crop and these are situated in poverty stricken rural areas. This industry directory further states that the sugar industry generates an average R12 billion annually and creates 79,000 direct jobs

and 350,000 indirect jobs. The South African Sugar Industry (2017) indicated that it produces high quality sugar which contribute to the national economy. It is against this background that the sugar industry makes a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of the rural areas where small scale farming takes place.

This research was conducted in the North Coast of KwaZulu Natal and it focussed on the perceptions and attitudes of small-scale cane growers' offspring towards farming. The problem investigated in the study was the assumption that cane growers' offspring have negative perceptions and attitudes about agriculture in general and cane growing in particular. It is envisaged that unless the situation is attended the sustainability of cane farming in North Coast will be negatively affected. This situation is worsened by the fact that the farmers are aging with the average age between 30-62 years (Bruening et al. 2004) and once they retire it will affect sustainability and production. A similar situation was reported in the United States

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where one quarter of the total farmers were supposed to retire in 2031, showing a need of youth to succeed their parents, however it was found that both the state and federal government was not doing well in terms of policy to support the beginning farmers despite the fact that farming was seen as a critical career to produce food for the nation (Shute 2011). Two compelling justification for youth to take offer in farming were pronounced by two youth namely Rapetsoa and Sharmaigne both from Limpopo Province. Sharmaigne did a BSc degree in Microbiology, and on completion she joined her mother's farm Baraka Eco-Farming and Tourism near Eiland and since joining the farm her attitude has changed towards positive farming and she is encouraging the youth that farming is not a dirty job but instead youth should grab the opportunity presented by the agricultural sector (Maake 2017). The other youth managed to work with his mom and later got land from the traditional leader where she is operating in Modimolle. Although he said he went into farming as an accident but later loved it. The advice he offered in his talk to the OAU youth forum held in Addis Ababa include three issues namely access to land and financial services, need to challenge the perception that informal sector farmers provide poor quality produce, and the need to access to fair markets (Rapetsoa 2013).

### Objectives

The main objective of the paper is to give an account of the perceptions and attitudes of the offspring of small scale cane-growers in the North Coast of KwaZulu Natal. The importance of this study emanates from the fact that in communally owned areas where most Small scale growers (SSGs) are located, the land is secured through traditional tenure and it is expected that the offspring of current land users who are SSGs will inherit this land in accordance with custom. If the offspring of current SSGs have negative perceptions and negative attitudes towards agriculture they will be reluctant to continue with farming, thus compromising agricultural production.

### Literature Review

The concept of sustainability is defined differently by different authors although they all agree on the need for long term thinking and

almost all authors have the same end result in mind. Therefore, sustainability is about taking a long term view with the objective of ensuring long term availability of goods and services. Dumanski (1997: 15) refers to sustainability in agriculture as the secured future. In other words it is to leave future generations as many, if not more, opportunities as we have had ourselves. It is our view that any meaningful discussion about sustainability should take into cognizance the circumstances of young people who are either current or potential farmers. Sustainable agriculture is about the future which means that future generations will have to continue to play a role if sustainability is to be ensured. Williams in Chizari et al. (2006: 52) states that economically sound, environmentally protective and social acceptability were the three widely advocated components of sustainable agriculture. In the context of this research the main focus has been on the acceptability of farming to young people. In addressing this concept of sustainability, Groenewald (2002: 4) argues that irrespective of the site, nature or practice, "the major objective of sustainable agriculture and rural development is to increase food production in a sustainable way. The author goes on to say that sustainability is now regarded as a norm of evaluation rather than a specific identified farming practice".

However it should be noted that this concept can also be viewed as a process rather than an occurrence, a direction rather than a destination and a philosophy and system of farming (Groenewald 2002: 1). Despite all this understanding it is the youth who can make this concept to work. Observations reveal the opposite, for example, youth migrate into urban areas because they see poverty in the rural areas. It is the writers' views that unless young people remain active in agriculture rural areas will be devoid of the necessary skills to act as main economic driver. This situation is also affected by the perceptions that youth carry. A study carried in Indonesia displayed the negative opinions from the youth. For example according to Leavy and Hosain (2014: 23) found that in the community of Cianjur, young people in their community did not choose farming because it had low social status, seen as dirty work, 'made their skin darker' in a context in which fair skin is associated with high socioeconomic class and skilled rather than manual work.

When reflecting on the attitudes of young people, Aphunu and Atoma (2010: 46) state that “youths are a formidable force in the agricultural production process, constituting a sizeable proportion of future progressive farmers and better citizens in rural areas. While their contribution towards attaining food security cannot be underestimated, their apparent lukewarm attitude towards agriculture is a source of concern and challenge to the development of agricultural extension”.

Since this paper focuses on perceptions and attitudes it will be fair to define these concepts in order to put issues into perspective. “Perception makes us aware of the world around us. Perception is a selective process by which we interpret and give meaning to external factors. It is seldom realistic and essentially a subjective process” (Bergh et al. 2003: 104). On the other hand, an attitude is defined as a way of being “set” toward or against certain things (Lundy et al. 2006). Another author shedding more light on this subject asserted that attitudes are learned through socialization and are usually enduring influences on cognitions and behaviours (Perloff cited by Lundy et al. (2006: 45). Although the youth may not necessarily be socialized to hate farming but one is inclined to believe that what they observe might be influencing them to have the attitude, for example the youth in North Coast might be reluctant because they are seeing their parents struggling to make ends meet with income from cane farming. As a result, they prefer careers outside agriculture.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focused on the youth of 14-35 years of age, whose parents or close relatives are small scale growers that are located in the areas of KwaZulu Natal North Coast and Zululand Region. There are seven mills on the North Coast of KwaZulu Natal. The respondents were the young people whose parents are cane growers who supply five of the seven sugar mills that are situated on the North Coast of KwaZulu Natal. These mills are Maidstone, Darnall, Gledhow, Amatikulu and Felixton.

According to the National Youth Commission Act 19 of 1996, youth are defined as all people between the ages 14 – 35 years. Although there are various definitions of the term “youth” for the sake of simplicity the researchers decid-

ed to use this definition. Mathiva (2012: 15) states that the data estimates that youth between the ages of 14 – 35 years is estimated to be at 20.5 million people representing 40.9 percent of the total population of 54 million people of South Africa.

A probability sampling approach was adopted in this study which meant that each element of the survey population had a known and equal chance of being selected. There were five strata representing five sugar mills and simple random sampling was applied in each stratum of the total population. A total of 193 respondents were reached from a survey population of the offspring of 11 527 growers who delivered cane to the five mills during the 2013/14 season. Almost 99 percent of respondents are located in communally owned areas that fall under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders. All respondents were Black South Africans. The study used a quantitative research design and a structured questionnaire was utilized to collect data and the method used was face-to-face interviews.

The questionnaire was piloted before the main data collection took place and some changes were subsequently made to the questionnaire. The gathered data was captured and manipulated using statistical software. As part of the analysis frequency distributions as well as statistical analyses were undertaken. Regarding ethical consideration the respondents were assured that confidentiality would be assured and that they were not forced to participate in the study.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 57 percent of respondents were male while females comprised 43 percent. This shows that small scale cane farming in the area under study is dominated by males. In terms of age categories a total of 63.2 percent of respondents were between the ages 19-30 while the 31-35 age categories comprised 24.4 percent.

It was encouraging to discover that almost 40 percent of respondents had done agricultural subjects at school and this favours well for the future of agriculture. This statement is based on the argument that it will be difficult to voluntarily choose a subject that you are not interested in. The level of education of respondents inspired confidence because at least 57 percent of respondents had completed matric and the other 14 percent had attained a tertiary qualifica-

tion. Only two percent of respondents had never been to school.

The finding of 62 percent of respondents have undergone some training in sugar cane agriculture suggests that the young people are already involved and interested in cane farming. This training in sugar cane agriculture may be formal, informal or a combination of the two.

It was also found that 34.4 percent were unemployed. This refers to official employment. However, some of the unemployed do assist their parents in running their cane farms. The rest are engaged in full or part time studying 25.5 percent, full time or part time employment 28.7 percent, running a business 7.3 percent and working full time while studying part time 4.2 percent. The high level of unemployment gives an opportunity for increased participation of the youth in farming activities provided opportunities are provided.

### Perceptions of Income Generation from Cane Farming

Respondents were asked whether they believed that small scale cane farming generates enough income to sustain a good living. The findings are indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Perceived income generation from cane farming**

| <i>Perceived income generation from cane farming</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree                                    | 12               | 6.2            |
| Disagree                                             | 26               | 13.5           |
| Not sure                                             | 32               | 16.6           |
| Agree                                                | 89               | 46.1           |
| Strongly agree                                       | 32               | 16.6           |
| Missing system                                       | 2                | 1.0            |
| Total                                                | 193              | 100.0          |

Table 1 shows that the sum of those who either agreed or disagreed with this statement stands at 52.7 percent which reflects positively on cane farming. Only 19.7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement while another 16.6 percent stated that they were not sure. The fact that the result of those who agreed or strongly agreed is slightly above fifty percent shows that there is positive perception about cane farming generating enough income to sustain a good living. This finding might influence

the respondents to choose agriculture as a career.

### Perceived Profitability of Cane Farming

The perception on profitability of cane farming is a straight forward to be convinced. Few authors have almost agreed on the energy that youth have. According to Ekong (2003) in Chikezie et al. (2012: 224) asserted that youth believe that they have the knowledge that agricultural production can really be a profitable venture. The perceptions of respondents with regard to profitability of cane farming are reflected in Table 2.

**Table 2: Perceived profitability of cane farming**

| <i>Perceived profitability of cane farming</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree                              | 5                | 2.6            |
| Disagree                                       | 7                | 3.6            |
| Not sure                                       | 24               | 12.4           |
| Agree                                          | 118              | 61.1           |
| Strongly agree                                 | 37               | 19.2           |
| Missing system                                 | 2                | 1.0            |
| Total                                          | 193              | 100.0          |

In Table 2 it is interesting to note that the majority of respondents 80.3 percent strongly agree that cane farming is profitable as opposed to only 6.2 percent who disagreed. The other 12.4 percent were not sure. The results show that perceptions of heirs of small scale growers regarding cane profitability are positive. If the results could remain like this there is hope for the young people that they can succeed their parents as cane growers.

### More Financial Returns are from Farming as Compared to Non-farming Activities

In rural areas there are various sources of incomes, chief of them are different grants that help the families for livelihoods. Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions whether more income is derived from farming or non-farming activities. The findings are indicated in Table 3. According to Table 3 about 45.6 percent of the respondents disagree with the statement that more financial returns are derived from farming. At least 29.5 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement whereas 23.8 percent were

not sure. This is the perception that youth of North Coast have about farming. The low rating that farming does not bring more financial returns is not a positive one among the youth; this might be caused by the fact that they see their parents struggling every day to deal with poverty in the households.

**Table 3: Comparisons of financial returns between farming and non-farming activities**

| <i>Returns between farming and non-farming activities</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree                                         | 13               | 6.7            |
| Disagree                                                  | 75               | 38.9           |
| Not sure                                                  | 46               | 23.8           |
| Agree                                                     | 46               | 23.8           |
| Strongly agree                                            | 11               | 5.7            |
| Missing system                                            | 2                | 1.0            |
| Total                                                     | 193              | 100.0          |

#### **Taking up Cane Farming if There is Money to be Made**

It is the writers' observations that the choice of career in many occasions is influenced by whether such a career will generate more income or not. Respondents were asked as to whether they will be prepared to take up cane farming as a career if it can be proven that there is money in cane farming. The results are indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4: Possibility of taking up cane farming if there is money to be made**

| <i>Taking up cane farming if there is money</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| No                                              | 9                | 4.7            |
| Not sure                                        | 19               | 9.8            |
| Yes                                             | 160              | 82.9           |
| Total                                           | 188              | 97.4           |
| Missing System                                  | 5                | 2.6            |
| Total                                           | 193              | 100.0          |

**Table 5: Respondents' preferences for cane farming**

| <i>Preferences for Cane Farming</i> | <i>I like cane farming as it generates income.</i> |                | <i>I like cane farming as it creates jobs in our community.</i> |                | <i>I like cane farming because it is not a complicated enterprise.</i> |                |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                                     | <i>Frequency</i>                                   | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Frequency</i>                                                | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Frequency</i>                                                       | <i>Percent</i> |
| Disagree                            | 7                                                  | 3.7            | 2                                                               | 1.1            | 19                                                                     | 10.0           |
| Not sure                            | 21                                                 | 11.1           | 3                                                               | 1.6            | 30                                                                     | 15.8           |
| Agree                               | 162                                                | 85.3           | 184                                                             | 97.4           | 141                                                                    | 74.2           |
| Total                               | 190                                                | 100.0          | 189                                                             | 100.0          | 190                                                                    | 100.0          |

Table 4 shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents 83 percent is prepared to follow cane farming as a career if there is money. This finding does not compare favourably with the widespread belief that young people are not interested in agriculture.

#### **Preferences for Cane Farming**

Respondents were given three statements to indicate their choices with regard to reasons of their preferences. The reasons are whether they liked it because it generates income, or whether it creates jobs or whether it not so complicated also asked to state their likes and dislikes of cane farming. The results are indicated in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that 85.3 percent of respondents like the income generation part of farming. Furthermore, 97.4 percent like the fact that cane farming creates jobs in the community. At least 74 percent of respondents like cane farming because it is not complex.

#### **Preferences Against Cane Farming**

Respondents were given three statements to indicate their choices with regard to their reasons for disliking cane farming. These statements were whether it is because of its low socio economic status (farm-life), or because of the type of work conducted that is difficult or because there is low income generated. The results are indicated in Table 6.

Table 6 reflects the dislikes of respondents regarding cane farming. Results are interesting in the sense that the majority of respondents disagreed with the statements that they do not like cane farming as per the suggested reasons such as: low socio economic status, the difficult type of work conducted and low income generated.

**Table 6: Respondents' preferences against cane farming**

| <i>Preferences against</i> | <i>I dislike cane farming because of its low socio economic status (farm-life)</i> |                | <i>I dislike cane farming because of the type of work conducted is difficult</i> |                | <i>I dislike cane farming because there is low income generated</i> |                |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                            | <i>Frequency</i>                                                                   | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Frequency</i>                                                                 | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Frequency</i>                                                    | <i>Percent</i> |
| Disagree                   | 142                                                                                | 75.1           | 124                                                                              | 65.6           | 127                                                                 | 67.6           |
| Not sure                   | 17                                                                                 | 9.0            | 17                                                                               | 9.0            | 37                                                                  | 19.7           |
| Agree                      | 30                                                                                 | 15.9           | 48                                                                               | 25.4           | 24                                                                  | 12.8           |
| Total                      | 189                                                                                | 100.0          | 189                                                                              | 100.0          | 188                                                                 | 100.0          |

### Further Preferences Against Cane Farming

There are many reasons that could play a role in discouraging the youth from participating in cane farming. Another set of three questions were asked to enable respondents to indicate their view points. The question was asked to test whether farming is disliked because of the three reasons namely low status, too rural, or dominated by the old generation. The results are indicated in Table 7.

According to the findings in Table 7, the majority of respondents did not agree with the statements of seeing agriculture as being of low status, too rural or dominated by the old generation and the percentages were 76.8 percent 78.8 percent and 69.5 percent respectively. The results also contradict the reasons normally put forward as factors that discourage youth in agriculture.

### Life Improvement by Cane Farming

Farming is done for a particular purpose. It is the writer's observations that its main objective is food security, income generation, fighting poverty and in the process provides a better life. Respondents were asked to state whether

their lives have been improved by cane farming. The results are indicated in Table 8.

**Table 8: Life improvement by cane farming**

| <i>Life improvement by cane farming</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree                       | 1                | .5             |
| Disagree                                | 15               | 7.8            |
| Not sure                                | 18               | 9.3            |
| Agree                                   | 112              | 58.0           |
| Strongly agree                          | 45               | 23.3           |
| Missing System                          | 2                | 1.0            |
| Total                                   | 193              | 100.0          |

According to Table 8, the majority of respondents of 81.3 percent have agreed or strongly agreed that farming has improved their lives. The findings have been consistent and have dismissed the idea that youth were negative about farming. A small percentage of respondents either disagreed or were not sure and the reasons could be that they do not appreciate that their parents use money from farming to support their families.

### Attitude towards Cane Farming

According to Lundy et al. (2006: 45), an attitude can be defined as a way of being "set"

**Table 7: Further preferences against cane farming**

| <i>Further preference against cane farming</i> | <i>I dislike cane farming because it is of low status</i> |                | <i>I dislike cane farming because it is too rural</i> |                | <i>I dislike cane farming because it is dominated by the old generation</i> |                |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                                                | <i>Frequency</i>                                          | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Frequency</i>                                      | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Frequency</i>                                                            | <i>Percent</i> |
| Disagree                                       | 146                                                       | 76.8           | 149                                                   | 78.8           | 132                                                                         | 69.5           |
| Not sure                                       | 16                                                        | 8.4            | 18                                                    | 9.5            | 15                                                                          | 7.9            |
| Agree                                          | 28                                                        | 14.7           | 22                                                    | 11.6           | 43                                                                          | 22.6           |
| Total                                          | 190                                                       | 100.0          | 189                                                   | 100.0          | 190                                                                         | 100.0          |

toward or against certain things. Perloff in Lundy et al. (2006: 45) states that attitudes are learned through socialization and are usually enduring influences on cognitions and behaviours. Respondents were asked to indicate their attitudes towards farming, and their findings are indicated in Table 9.

**Table 9: Attitude towards cane farming**

| <i>Attitude towards cane farming</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Negative                             | 15               | 7.8            |
| Not sure/ ambivalent                 | 28               | 14.5           |
| Positive                             | 148              | 76.7           |
| Missing System                       | 2                | 1.0            |
| Total                                | 193              | 100.0          |

Table 9 summarises the respondents' overall attitudes towards cane farming. An overwhelming majority of 76.7 percent of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards cane farming. This is encouraging to the farming sector because it gives hope that the youth will succeed their parents in farming thereby ensuring sustainability of agricultural production.

## CONCLUSION

The paper discussed various issues about the perceptions of the off springs in an attempt to identify the positions of the youth in understanding the business of cane farming in North Coast region. The paper specifically looked at 9 factors that are critical and are interrelated to some extent and these are: the potential of agriculture to generate money; the profitability of cane farming; whether more money can be generated from agriculture when it is compared with non-agricultural activities; preparedness to follow a career in cane farming, the status of agriculture in general; preference for cane farming; whether agriculture can contribute to improving the livelihood and attitude against cane farming. It can be concluded based on the results of the discussion that the majority of the youth of the cane growers have both positive perceptions and attitudes marked by 76.7 percent towards cane farming.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study disapproved the deep seated generalized believes that youth in

North Coast Region have negative perceptions towards agriculture. However, based on the discussions of the study the following recommendations are made in the next section. It is recommended that the policy makers should apply measures that will support the offspring who embrace agriculture. These measures should have to do with the increasing of the economic viability of cane farming.

There is also a need to deliberately promote agriculture to young people and develop programmes aimed at changing youth perceptions about agriculture. This can best be done through exposing the youth to the whole value chain in the context of commercial farming.

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