



Environment Digest 15

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Farming and COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 has disrupted agricultural activities and food systems around the world. But most significantly, it has highlighted the disadvantages and flaws of the world's current food system, which has led societies to be entirely reliant on large corporate supply-chain processes. The world's food value chain has over time eroded people's self-sufficiency skills and perfected the dependency on large corporates, exacerbating food insecurity during times of crisis. Those without financial means are effectively excluded and left to starve.

Farmworkers' living and working conditions

Farmworkers across the world are known to endure difficult working and living conditions, even under normal circumstances. Their daily challenges range from farm evictions, inadequate wages and violation of their human rights by their employers. Now, while the world is faced with the COVID-19 crisis, there is a rising and justifiable concern about the safety of farmworkers, who continue to toil to ensure food on everyone's table. All of a sudden they are considered to be essential workers providing essential services, though they have not always been treated as such.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/advocates-call-attention-pandemics-wrath-essential-farmworkers>

From production to waste

The necessary worldwide lockdown regulations will have detrimental effects on global food supply. Strict restrictions have been imposed on businesses (such as restaurants), schools and food schemes, which account for a significant portion of the buying market, especially of fresh produce. Large quantities of such food are therefore likely to go directly from production to waste.

<https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/sa-farming-covid-19-and-beyond-46436921>

Yet there remains a significant lack of connection between food that is being produced and the people who need it the most – the poor who cannot afford to pay full retail prices and who have no direct access to the food producers in the value chain. In South Africa and other developing parts of the world, the lockdown has been characterised by outcries of hunger in the most vulnerable communities (townships and rural areas) where several traditional means of access to affordable food have been adversely affected.

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2020-04-19-covid-19-lockdown-millions-hungry-as-work-dries-up/>

<https://citizen.co.za/news/covid-19/2271293/violence-and-looting-point-to-food-crisis-in-sa-lockdown/>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-18-call-for-child-grant-increase-to-ease-lockdown-food-crisis/>

The inability to access regional and global markets as we try to contain the spread of COVID-19, will have significant implications for struggling African farmers who already experience constraints in accessing global economic markets under normal circumstances. There is an urgent need to provide the necessary support to such farmers, while protecting and ensuring the safety of farmworkers as a means of addressing the crisis.

<https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/africa/african-farmers-lose-market-access-as-covid-19-crisis-widens/>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-04-20-what-policy-interventions-have-been-implemented-to-support-sa-agriculture/>

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