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Towards a common understanding of ‘emerging farmer’ in a South African context – an exploration of data from a survey in the former homelands of the Eastern Cape Province.

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Abstract:

The South African Agricultural sector is dualistic nature, comprised of large scale commercial farmers (mostly white) on one hand and on the other smallholder farming mainly practiced by black rural households in the former homelands. The smallholder farming, however is not homogeneous. Mostly a distinction is made between subsistence orientated smallholders and fully commercial orientated smallholders. Lately a middle class of smallholders falling in between these two groups has been a subject of much academic study and a large concern of smallholder policies in the last two decades. However there is no consensus on the criteria of describing these emerging farmers—various authors use different methods without giving sufficient details of who these emerging farmers are. This could have adverse effects and can potentially jeopardize success of development initiatives intended for this group of farmers. This article seeks to contribute towards a common understanding of the term ‘emerging farmer’ hence the group of farmers it represents by identifying various measures used to describe these farmers and apply to a data set from a survey of 379 smallholders from the former homelands of the Eastern Cape. Finally, the paper suggest a criteria based on the argument of the identified measures.

Key words: Emerging farmer, South Africa, Survey, Eastern Cape.

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1. Introduction

The South African agriculture is characterized by its two ‘agricultures’ consisting of highly capitalized, large scale and mostly white farmers on the one hand and on the other, the black subsistence farmers in the former homelands (Lipton, 1977). This dualism has been persistent for years and still exist even in this new democratic South Africa.

After the transition to the democratic South Africa, the smallholder farming started gaining attention from the government to remedy the injustice of Apartheid. As such it was realized that the smallholder farmers are not a homogeneous group as they were previously seen by many. But rather, three transitional categories of smallholders were identified (Niewoudt, 2000; Mohamed & Van Averbek, 2006). This is a transition from those who are farming to meet household food security to those who are commercially orientated and whose objective is selling their produce. In between these two groups there is a middle class of smallholders who aspire to fully commercialize their production referred to as ‘emerging farmers’. The

above transition stems from Pingali and Rosegrant (1995)'s argument from Asian experience and is widely adopted even in South Africa.

However, in South Africa, there is no general consensus on who these 'emerging' farmers are, let alone knowing their numbers. This lack of common criteria for defining emerging farmers has been evident in Rother et al (2008). Some scholars and government reports refer to emerging farmers as land reform beneficiaries (for example: Macleod et al., 2008; Xaba & Dlamini, 2015; Mohlatlole et al., 2015) while others (e.g. Khapayi & Celiens, 2016) use them interchangeably with subsistence farmers. Some use the combination of the two methods above such as Grobler et al (2008). Clearly, there is no agreed yardstick in measuring emerging farmers—everyone uses their own measures without giving sufficient details of who (traits) these emerging farmers are. Therefore, the inappropriate use of this term has adverse effects as it can potentially jeopardize the success of many policies intended for this group of farmers through the unequal understanding of the term and the group of farmers it represents.

Therefore, the main objective of this article is to contribute in addressing this lack of common understanding by suggesting criteria to be used in classifying the so-called 'emerging farmers'. This is done by first, identifying the common yardsticks used to distinguish emerging farmers from other group of smallholders. Secondly, by using data from the Eastern Cape to test if the sample can be regarded as emerging farmers using the identified yardsticks. The paper is sub-divided as follows: section two gives review of literature on the importance of the emerging farmers while section three identifies the commonly used measuring sticks of emerging farmers and lastly discussion, conclusion and policy implication are given in section four.

2. Why emerging farmers matter?

South African agricultural sector is in a process of transformation-decolonizing the sector from the decades of racial discrimination of black farmers. This transformation is manifested through the Land Reform Policy and the other support measures intended to aid previously disadvantaged farmers. In the land redistribution pillar of the Land Reform Policy, emerging farmers are identified as the potential beneficiaries of the current land, mostly owned by white commercial farmers, although not much is understood about who they are. One would find this unclear, confusing and as a remedy for failure. This section outline the importance of emerging farmers in the South African agricultural sector and uses relevant international evidence.

2.1 Poverty reducing effect

South African rural areas (where majority of the emerging farmers live) are characterized by poverty and lack of employment opportunities. As such it has been argued that, since many poor live in the rural areas and many already engaged in some form of farming activities, agriculture is a viable tool to fight rural poverty (Machete, 2004; World bank, 2007; Diao et al.,2010). Evidence from Asia's Green Revolution has showed that agriculture can be used as a motor to drive rural economic growth and development (Hazell, 2009). This can be achieved in many avenues- one is increasing rural incomes as agriculture creates demand for non-farm goods and supply of food which improves food security. The second is employment creation, both direct and indirect.

2.2 Creation of employment opportunities

The commercial agricultural sector in South Africa has shown a strong trend of job shedding in the last decade, as evidence from the Western Cape showed (Du Toit & Ally, 2003). This is attributed to many factors such as intensive use of machinery which reduces the number of unskilled labour among other factors. Furthermore, Conradie (2007) argued that shedding is likely to continue in the commercial farming. Given this trend in the commercial agriculture, the smallholder which tends to be more labour intensive can contribute in creating a number of jobs in agriculture. One way to increase employment opportunities is stimulating rural economic growth through a demand led growth.

2.3 Demand-led growth

There is a link between agricultural sector and non-agricultural sector that is created by the market forces of supply and demand. As such the expansion of the agricultural sector has an ability to stimulate growth in the non-agricultural sector and has a poverty reducing effect. Hendricks (2002) has shown that increment rural household's income has a potential in stimulate spending in the non-tradable goods and thus contributing to local economic growth.

Furthermore, Rosegrant and Hazell (2000) found a strong impact of agriculture in rural development in countries where small-scale farms dominate. In this respect, increasing productivity of emerging farmers can increase the demand of inputs used in production such as fertilizers, pesticides and labour-if the constraints facing them are addressed and given well-developed support. For more details about challenges and constraints of smallholder farmers see Von Leoper et al. (2016) and Khapayi & Celiers. (2016). Moreover, this will reduce unemployment and increase the supply of food contributing to rural food security

which is a serious problem in rural areas of South Africa. However for this to happen, there has to be efficient use of resources among other factors.

2.4 Efficient use of resources

Empirical evidence from the Eastern Cape smallholders has shown that small-scale farmers are at least competitive and efficient in some activities such as horticultural, field crops and livestock products (Ngqangweni, 1999). In addition, empirical evidence from the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy—BFAP (2017) shows that small-scale communal broiler farmers achieve better profit margins than their large commercial counterparts. These findings confirmed the international argument that small farms are more efficient than large farms noted by Lipton (2005). Ngqangweni (1999) also found a strong growth linkage between rural farming and non-farm economy, which he describes as one which can lead to under-utilized resources being put into production if well-developed support is given and the barriers are removed.

However there is overwhelming evidence of the under-utilized land in the Eastern Cape (see: Andrew & Fox, 2004; Connor & Mtwana, 2017; De la Hay & Beinart, 2016) which can be put under production if emerging farmer's challenges are addressed and a well-developed support is designed. The next section will outline the methodology used in this paper.

3. Data and approach

Data used in this article was obtained through a survey in three district municipalities of the Eastern Cape Province through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered using a local language (isiXhosa) to improve response. A sample of 379 households was randomly selected, 175 being in Amathole District Municipality, 84 in OR Tambo District Municipality and 120 in Chis Hani District Municipality. Only households selling their produce regularly were interviewed. In this regard a lower threshold of twenty percent sales of produce was used as a condition for selecting the households. This was used to ensure that farmers who at least have some degree of commercial orientation were interviewed.

This study uses a desktop approach to identify the common measures used in categorising smallholder farmers. In this regard, six commonly used measures were identified and used as a benchmark to analyse the survey data. Mainly descriptive statistics, tables, mean, and charts were used to present the results. Furthermore, Household Commercialization Index was used to measure commercial orientation. The identified methods are given in the next section together with the results.

4. Identified common measures used to describe emerging farmers

Various measuring sticks are used by different authors in the literature of smallholder farming in South Africa including government reports. However, there seems to be a lack of consensus-one school of thought distinguish the three categories of smallholder without giving a definition. While the other use these terms 'subsistence farmers' and 'emerging farmers' interchangeable. In this section various measuring sticks are identified and applied in to the collected data. These include the size of the farm land, racial group, turnover major reason for involvement in farming activities, extent of commercialization and intentions for expanding production.

4.1 Land size and tenure

As a result of the legacy of Segregation policies notable the Land Act of 1913, most non-white farmers in South Africa farm in the former homelands, with communal tenure rights. Most of the non-whites smallholders owning less than a hectare, while a very low percentage own more than five hectares (Piennar & Von Vintel, 2014). This excludes the land redistribution beneficiaries most whom farm on state land on a conditional contract. Both the farmers farming under communal tenure and those on redistributed land are referred to as emerging farmers. This creates an impression that there are two types of emerging farmers, one on the communal land and others in the redistributed land. But the criteria used to select land redistribution beneficiaries is based on farmers showing merit in farming under communal land tenure, which would be believed to have progressed to commercial smallholders.

While land size can be an important measure of farming scale, Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998) have argued why it is not a good measure on its own. Their argument stems from a land productivity point of view, as different farms have different types of land-for example a farm may be large but the productivity be very low compared with a small farm in a good soil hence it affects the turnover.

The sample of households used in this study all were farming in the communal tenure, while the average farm size was 2, 7 hectares. The smallest farm was one hectare and the largest was 30 hectares. Therefore they fall in the communal emerging farmers.

4.2 Turnover

Turnover is one of the identified yardsticks in defining emerging farmers. This notion was first proposed by Kirsten (2011). He advocates that all farmers that have a net income below

half a million rand per annum, should be regarded as smallholders. This approach mainly proves the point of the dangers of using land size only to classify a farm. Figure 1 below shows net farm incomes of the surveyed households. It is apparent that the net farm incomes of the respondents are far less than half a million, with an average of R45209, the exception was one household where the net farm income is R800 000 per year.

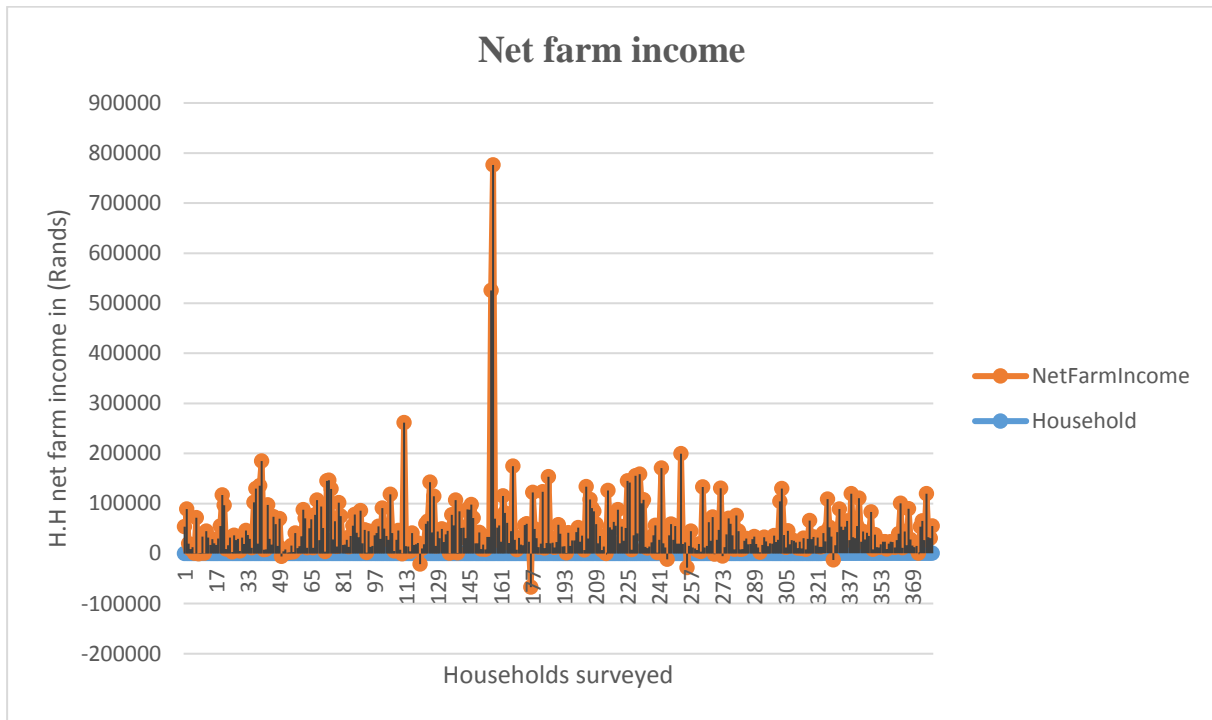


Figure 1: Household net farm income

4.3 Racial group

The concept of emerging farmers has been widely used after the transition to the democratic South Africa to refer to farmers coming from previously disadvantaged groups—non-white. The argument was that since they have been deprived of productive land and support from the government during Apartheid, they should be the main priority in this new democratic government (Vink & van Zyl, 1998). In this regard, the South African literature (McLeod et al., 2008; Xaba & Dlamini, 2015; Khapayi & Celiers, 2016) strongly paints emerging farmers as non-white, mainly black. This is evident from the policies developed for the emerging farmers that tend to support black farmers mostly for example the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme-CASP (DAFF, 2015). Using this criterion, the sample studied here meets this requirement since all respondents were black.

4.4 Main reason of farming

Classification of smallholders by their primary reasons for engaging in farming activities has been widely used in South Africa (see for example Aliber & Hart, 2009; StatsSA, 2016). This is considered a good measure because it makes a distinction between those who farm for meeting household food requirements and those who are interested in generating revenue from their produce, in a sense it gives an impression of entrepreneurship trait. However when used as a sole measure it does not say much. For example some smallholders although they may sell, but would sell a very low percentage of their produce and others more, therefore one would argue that they cannot be classified in the same category.

Figures, 2 and 3 below show the main reasons for engaging in crop and livestock farming among farming households in the Eastern Cape. Most households keep livestock for two reasons, (1) to attain extra source of income and (2) to attain main source of income. However, for crop farming it is different as most engage for extra source of food followed by main source of income and main source of food. This suggests that the sample households are more commercial inclined towards livestock than crops. One other possible cause of this, might be that crops (Maize, Cabbage and Potatoes which are the major produced crops among the sample) are staple food for the households, unlike cattle, sheep and goats which are sold as live animals. Therefore most household in the studied sample engage in farming for extra and main sources of income, but mostly in livestock. It has to be noted also that most farm with livestock and crops.

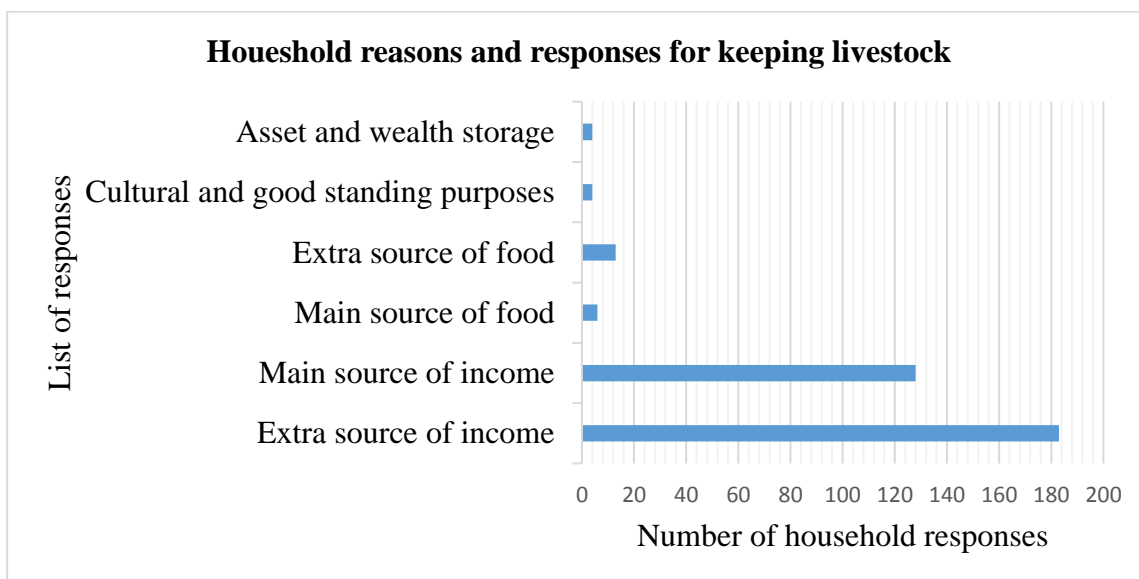


Figure 2: Main reasons for keeping livestock

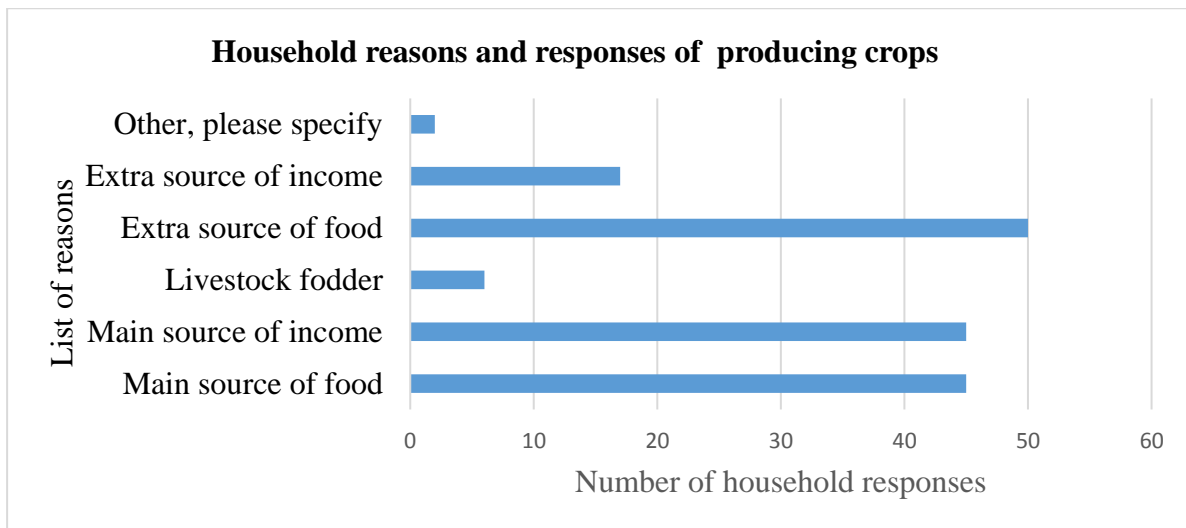


Figure 3: Main reasons for producing crops

4.5 Proportion of sold produce

This measure is more related to commercialization, which has been and still is a subject of extensive research for developing countries. Various measures have been used to gauge commercialization across the globe (Von Braun, 1995; Jaleta et al., 2009; Gebremadhin & Jaleta, 2010). In this study, due to the nature of the available data, Crop Commercialization Index was used. CCI is the total quantity of a specific crop sold by a household per year divided by the total quantity of crop that was produced by a household per year. This method has been widely used to assess commercialization of smallholders, for example in the following studies: Govereh et al. (1999) and Dube & Guveya (2016).

Table 1: Crop Commercialization Indexes (CCI) for major crop activities

| Activity | Mean CCI | N |
|----------|----------|-----|
| Maize | 0.66 | 116 |
| Potatoes | 0.83 | 53 |
| Cabbage | 0.73 | 51 |

Table 1 above shows major crop activities as well as their CCI from a sample of households in the Eastern Cape. The results show that maize is the most produced crop followed by potatoes and cabbage. While maize is the most produced crop, it is the least commercialized crop followed by cabbage. Potatoes are the most commercialized crops. Since maize is mostly produced, also a staple food and the households rely on local market, which might contribute to its low commercialization. Therefore on average the sample of respondents studied are commercial orientated but more on vegetables than maize.

4.6 Intentions for expanding production

In the current body of South African literature (Niewoudt, 2000; Senyolo, 2007) on emerging farmers, there is a general notion that the emerging farmers should aspire to increase their production and market participation. In addition to commercial orientation through market participation outlined in 4.5, in this sub-section, this attribute will be served by looking at the intentions of smallholder's willingness to move from the former homelands to private farms outside the homelands. In addition, the respondents were asked if they felt constrained in farming in the former homelands, where there is very limited land and open grazing system where one can hardly control breeding and communal land tenure.

Figure 3 below provides a summary of the households willingness to move and condition of moving. Majority (72%) of households were willing to move on condition that they will get full post-settlement support from the state. Only a very few households were willing to move with only limited support—help to purchase land only. So were the proportion of those who were not willing to move at all (28%). Regarding constraint by farming in the former homelands, majority felt constrained (78%), while a very small proportion (22%) stated otherwise.

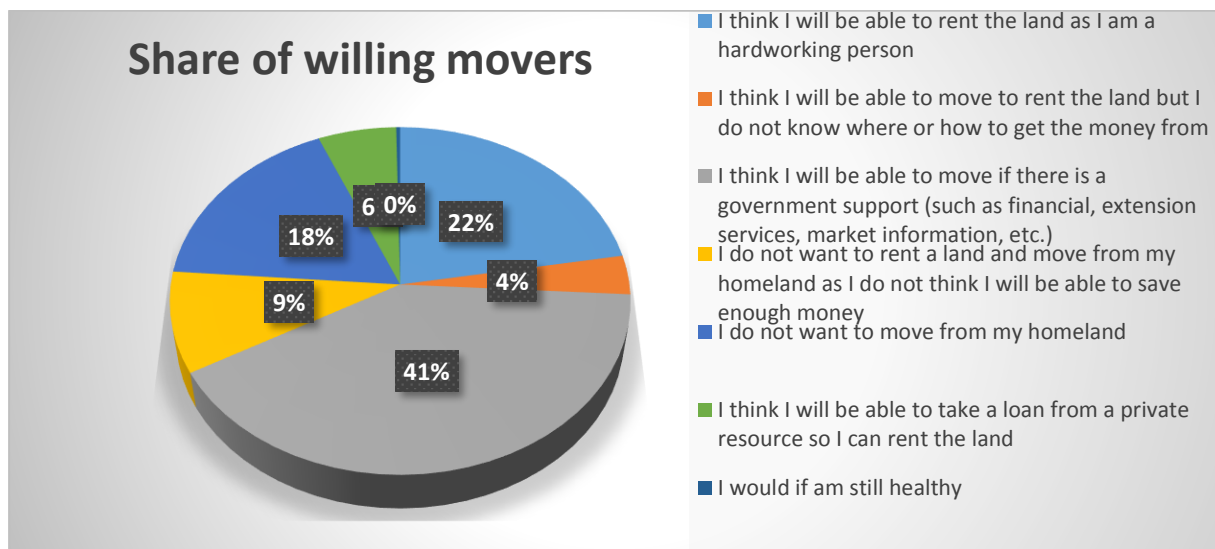


Figure 4: Share and conditions of household willingness to move

5. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to contribute towards a better and common understanding of emerging farming group of smallholders. This was inspired by the wide use of this term 'emerging farmer', yet little details on the criteria of identifying this group of farmers have been given. The importance of emerging farmers in this period of transforming the South

Africa agricultural sector as well as the potential contribution of emerging farmers to rural economy was outlined. Through a review of literature, the article identified six common measures used by various authors to describe emerging farmers in the South African context. It was also noticed that various authors use different methods with little justification, assuming a common understanding of this group of farmers. The take home message is that all these measures stated above have less meaning when used in isolation than when used as a collective.

Therefore this paper suggests the following criteria for identifying emerging farmers in South Africa. Since there is very little evidence of white emerging farmers and white farmers farming on the communal land due to the legacy of Apartheid, race seems to be a critical measure, therefore emerging farmers tend to be mostly non-white. Secondly, farm size is not a good measure as argued by Kirsten and van Zyl (1998). However turnover does a good job in measuring the ability of a farmer to use resources efficiently, therefore emerging farmers can be taken as those who make less than half a million rand turnover per annum.

Thirdly, since emerging farmers are believed to be commercially orientated, they therefore should be farming for obtaining main extra source of income in either crop or livestock to those who farm with both, because some livestock farmers plant crops for feeding stock and some crop farmers keep livestock for draft power or to have manure to fertilize crop fields. Fourthly, emerging farmers are believed to be selling at least some portion of their produce, but how little is 'at least'?

Furthermore, there are subsistence farmers who sell surplus, so how would we differentiate the two? Therefore an emerging farmer should be selling more than the produce they use for own consumption at least 0.6 CCI given that they produce for the market. Moreover, emerging farmers should be those who inspire to fully commercialize their farming. Lastly, most of the sample of households used in this article can be concluded that they at least reflect typical emerging farmers if judged by the above criteria.

While this paper has attempted to make a contribution in addressing the uncommon understanding of the emerging farmers that exist in the literature, there are still some research gaps on the discussed measures. For example, emerging farmers are regarded as those who sell some portion of their produce, but it is not clear how much is that. One potential study can look at the degree at which emerging farmers are commercialized and identify factors influencing the commercialization.

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