

**REPORT OF**

**THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY**

**INTO FARM ATTACKS**

**Volume III**

## CHAPTER 11

### THE FARMING COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the position that farmers and farm workers occupy in the South African economy and broader society. The difficulty with calculating the number of farms, farmers and farm workers is discussed. To determine the incidence of farm attacks, and the risk the farming community faces being victimised by farm attackers, it is necessary to quantify the number of farms and the people who live on them. The various agricultural organisations are also discussed.

#### FARMERS

##### Economic activities

In the past South Africa's agricultural sector was highly regulated with subsidies and financial concessions available to farmers. Since 1980, there has been a gradual reduction in agricultural support measures. In the late 1990s this process has gained momentum. Export subsidies have been phased out, and agricultural control boards that guaranteed secure markets for farmers disbanded. Today the sector has to respond to price signals in a free market.<sup>1</sup>

According to South Africa's 1996 constitution, agricultural support to farmers is vested in the provincial governments, which provide farmers with a range of services. The National Government retains the overall regulatory and policy functions, and agricultural trade and marketing.

The Department of Agriculture (at national level) seeks to ensure equitable access to agriculture and to promote the contribution of agriculture to the development of communities and the national economy, in order to enhance income, food security and employment. The Department of Agriculture also promotes the development of the small-farming sector.

The Department of Agriculture (through the Directorate: Farmer Settlement and Development) controls and administers some 668 million hectares of State agricultural land. The primary goal of the Directorate is the internal administration of State agricultural land with the aim of farmer settlement and ownership reform. State agricultural land is divided as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- 582 million hectares of land expropriated by the South African Development Trust and,

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<sup>1</sup> Government Communication and Information Service *South Africa Yearbook 2001/02* (Pretoria, 2002) p 57.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* 73.

- 87 million hectares of commercial land purchased from insolvent estates and properties transferred by the Department of Public Works.

About 13% of South Africa's surface area can be used for crop production. High-potential arable land comprises just over a fifth (22%) of the total arable land. In 1996 commercial farmers owned 64.7 million hectares or 79% of the available commercial farming area. They rented or leased 16.8 million hectares (20%), and 0.7 (1%) million hectares were farmed on shares.<sup>3</sup>

Primary agriculture contributes about 3.2% to the gross domestic product (GDP) in South Africa, and provides almost 9% of formal employment. However, there are strong interrelated linkages between the agricultural sector and the rest of the economy so that the 'agro-industrial sector' is estimated to comprise 15% of GDP. Despite the farming industry's declining share of GDP, it is crucial to the economy, development and stability of the southern African region. The various sectors of the industry employ some one million people.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of the gross geographic product (GGP), in 2000 the agricultural sector produced the most in the Western Cape with R5.6 billion, followed by Mpumalanga (R3.5bn), the Free State and Eastern Cape (R3.1bn each), KwaZulu-Natal (R2.9bn), North West (R2.4bn), the Northern Cape and Limpopo (R1.7bn each) and Gauteng (R1.4bn).<sup>5</sup>

According to Statistics South Africa's *1996 Agricultural Survey*, commercial farming generated a gross income of R32.9bn in 1996. More than R13bn (or 40%) of the total gross income generated was from commercial farming in animals and animal products. Horticultural products and field crops contributed 28% and 27%, respectively. Forestry products contributed 5%.<sup>6</sup>

### **Number of farming units and farmers**

According to Statistics South Africa's *1996 Agricultural Survey* there were 60 938 commercial farming units in South Africa; down from 62 084 in 1990.<sup>7</sup> (Note that the 1996 Agricultural Survey covered commercial farming activities only, and excluded the erstwhile TBVC states - Transkei, Bophuthaswana, Venda and Ciskei - as well as black 'homeland' areas.) In 1996 the Free State contained the highest number of commercial farming units (11 272 units or 18.5%), followed by the Western Cape and North West.<sup>8</sup> (See Figure 2.)

<sup>3</sup> Statistics South Africa *Agricultural Surveys 1994, 1995, 1996* (Pretoria, 1999)

<sup>4</sup> Government Communication and Information Service *South Africa Yearbook 2001/02*, (Pretoria, 2002) p 58.

<sup>5</sup> Kane-Berman J. (ed), *South Africa Survey 2001/2002* (South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 2001) p 151.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics South Africa *Agricultural Surveys 1994, 1995, 1996*, (Pretoria, 1999) p v.

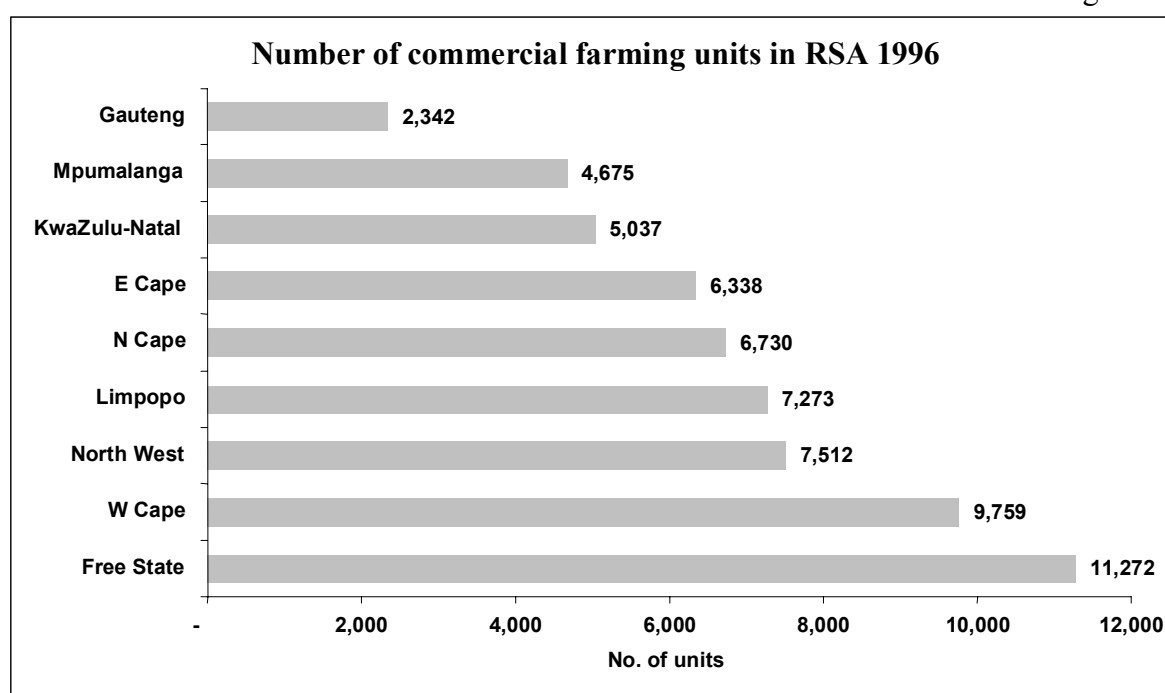
<sup>7</sup> The survey data was collected by way of a postal survey from a sample of approximately 6,300 farmers with a response rate of 74.2%.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics South Africa *Agricultural Surveys 1994, 1995, 1996*, (Pretoria, 1999) p iii

In 1996 the largest commercial farming units were recorded in the drier areas such as the Northern Cape, where most of the farming land is used for grazing purposes with an average size of a farming unit being 4,418 hectares. The smallest farming units were recorded in Gauteng, where the average farming unit was 323 hectares.<sup>9</sup>

In respect of the *1996 Agricultural Survey* a ‘farming unit’ consisted of one or more separate farms, holdings or portions of land whether contiguous or not, provided they were situated in the same magisterial district and operated as a single unit. Farms or portions of land situated in different magisterial districts were regarded as separate farming units. The number of farming units, therefore, does not represent the number of farmers, as a specific farming unit can be operated by more than one farmer, and one farmer can operate more than one farming unit.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 2



Source: Statistics South Africa

RSA: Excluding erstwhile TBVC states and black ‘homelands’

It is consequently extremely difficult to estimate the number of commercial farmers in South Africa using survey data which is dated, geographically incomplete and which used methodologies that were not specifically developed to count the number of commercial farmers in the country. Nevertheless, submissions were made to the Committee by organisations which could make informed estimates of the number of commercial farmers in the country<sup>11</sup>:

- According to Agri SA, there were about 45 000 large-scale farmers in South Africa in 2001.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* iii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* p 65.

<sup>11</sup> See section below on ‘*Agricultural Organisations*’ p 20.

<sup>12</sup> Oral submission to the Committee by Agri SA, Pretoria, 2001-07-04.

- The Transvaal Agricultural Union of SA estimates there were approximately 40 000 commercial farmers in South Africa in 2001, excluding farm managers who manage a farm for someone else.<sup>13</sup>
- According to Colonel B.J. Schoeman of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), attached to Joint Operations, there were approximately 256 000 commercial farmers in South Africa in 2001.<sup>14</sup> Colonel Schoeman's estimate is based on the following sources and figures: Firstly, according to the South African Revenue Service (SARS) 253 000 people were registered as deriving their income from commercial farming during 2001. A further 91 300 people were registered as deriving their income from commercial farming and other occupations. Secondly, the Department of Land Affairs estimates that there are 523 000 commercial farms in the country of which ±65% are occupied (i.e. 340 000 occupied commercial farms).

The Committee grappled with the considerable discrepancies in the number of farmers in South Africa. Given this, it is impossible to accurately calculate the actual number of people living on farms and smallholdings in the country. This is unfortunate as a reasonably accurate figure of the number of farm and smallholding residents would permit a calculation of the risk farm and smallholding inhabitants face of becoming a victim of a farm attack.

## FARM WORKERS

No comprehensive picture of employment in the agricultural sector is available. According to official estimates for 2001 about 700 000 people were employed in the formal agricultural, hunting, forestry and fishing sector. Almost as many people were working in the informal sector in the broad agricultural sector. Some of these figures are likely to overlap with those of a 1997 rural survey showing that about 1.7 million households were engaged in farming in areas formerly designated as 'homelands'.

### 2001 Labour Force Survey

According to Statistics South Africa's *Labour Force Survey, February 2001*, 11.8 million people were employed in the formal and informal sectors in South Africa in 2001.<sup>15</sup> Of these, almost 1.4 million (11.8%) were employed in the 'agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing' sector. Only the 'wholesale and retail trade' sector (24.6%), 'community, social and personal services' sector (16.9%), and the 'manufacturing' sector (13.7%) employed more people. (See Table 1.)

Of the almost 1.4 million people employed in the agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing sector, 700 000 were employed in the formal sector and 653 000 in the informal sector (the remainder were unspecified).<sup>16</sup> Between 1996 and 2001 the number of employed persons

<sup>13</sup> Oral submission to the Committee by Transvaal Agricultural Union of SA, Pretoria, 2001-06-20.

<sup>14</sup> Oral and written submission to the Committee by Col. B J Schoeman, Pretoria, 200106-19.

<sup>15</sup> Statistics South Africa *Labour Force Survey February 2001* (Pretoria, 2001)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* p 26.

in the broad agricultural sector (formal and informal) increased by 593 000 or 78%. Overall, the total number of formal and informal jobs in all sectors of the South African economy increased by 28% over the same period. A break down of the racial composition of the persons employed in the agricultural sector in 2001 is given in Table 30.<sup>17</sup>

Table 30

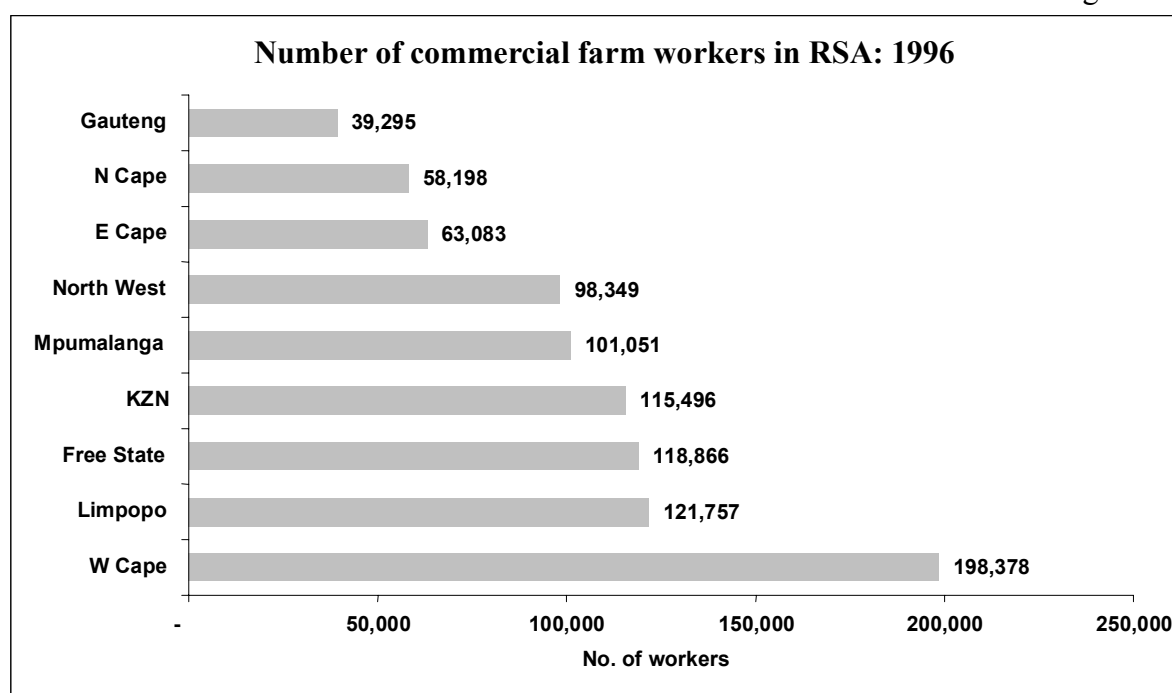
<b>Employment in the agricultural sector by race: 2001</b>					
<i>Sector</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Total</i>
Formal	445 000	181 000	70 000	---	699 000
Informal	631 000	11 000	---	---	653 000
Total	1 076 000 (79.6%)	192 000 (14.2%)	70 000 (5.2%)		1 352 000 (100%)

Source: Statistics South Africa. The sample size for Asians was too small for reliable estimates.

### 1996 Agricultural Survey by Statistics South Africa<sup>18</sup>

According to Statistics South Africa's *1996 Agricultural Survey*, commercial farmers employed 915 000 workers in 1996; down from 1 185 000 in 1990. In 1996 a third of the employees were casual and seasonal workers. Western Cape farmers employed the largest number of people, Gauteng farmers the least. (See figure 3)

Figure 3



Source: Statistics South Africa

RSA: Excluding erstwhile TBVC states and black 'homelands'

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* p 29-31.

<sup>18</sup> The survey data was collected by way of a postal survey from a sample of approximately 6,300 farmers with a response rate of 74.2%.

Most of the farm workers were black (74.6%), followed by coloured (22.1%), white (3.1%) and Asian (0.3%) workers.<sup>19</sup> (The survey covered commercial farming activities only, and excluded the erstwhile TBVC states and black 'homeland' areas.)

### 1996 Census

According to the 1996 national census, 814 000 people were employed in the agricultural sector. Of these 750,000 were employed in the agriculture and hunting sub-sector, 52 000 in the forestry and logging sub-sector and 13 000 in the fish farm sub-sector.<sup>20</sup>

Of the 814 000 agricultural sector employees in 1996, some 10 300 were employed as managers, while 23 700 employees had a tertiary educational qualification, and 46 700 a standard 10 (grade 12) level of education.

### 1997 Rural Survey<sup>21</sup>

According to the *1997 Rural Survey* (which surveyed the rural areas of the former 'homelands' of South Africa only), some 12.7 million people lived in rural areas in the former South African 'homelands'.<sup>22</sup> About 71% or 1.7 million households in the rural areas in the former 'homelands' had access to land for farming purposes. Of these about half (800 000 households) reported that the farming land they used for crops in the year prior to the survey was smaller than one hectare.

The overwhelming majority of the 1.7 million households (93%) were engaged in subsistence farming. Only 96 000 households (6%) who had access to farming land, actually sold crops including vegetable and fruit. Some 3% of the households who had access to farming land relied on farming activities for their main source of income.<sup>23</sup> Of the 902 000 households who had livestock, 18% were selling livestock.<sup>24</sup>

## AGRICULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

### Background

At the time of writing three unions represented the commercial agricultural sector in South Africa: Agri South Africa (Agri SA) with affiliates in all provinces, the Transvaal Agricultural Union of South Africa (TAU) with affiliates in certain provinces, and the

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<sup>19</sup> Statistics South Africa *Agricultural Surveys 1994, 1995, 1996* (Report no. 11-01-01, Pretoria, 1999) p iv.

<sup>20</sup> Statistical Tables, Appendix 2, <<http://www.nda.agric.za/docs/Employment/Appendix%202.htm>>, (24 May 2002).

<sup>21</sup> For the 1997 Rural Survey a total of 600 enumeration areas were drawn for the ten 'homelands', and ten households were selected from each enumeration area, yielding a sample of some 6,000 households.

<sup>22</sup> Statistics South Africa *Rural Survey, 1997* (Statistical release P0360, Pretoria, 1999)

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* p 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* p 7.

National African Farmers Union (NAFU) with affiliates and associate members. The Agricultural Employers' Organisation (AEO) is an agricultural organisation which represents the interests of agricultural employers in the country.

Farmers can become members of organised agriculture in different ways. Normally farmers join a local farmers' association which is affiliated to a provincial agricultural union, which in turn is affiliated to a national union. Farmers' associations deal with local issues, while the provincial unions co-ordinate matters at provincial level and make recommendations regarding national matters to their national unions.

There are also a number of special commodity organisations, which are affiliated with either the provincial agricultural unions, or directly with a national union. Examples are commodity organisations for grain producers, wool growers, sugar-cane growers, poultry producers, timber growers and vegetable and fruit producers.

### **Agri South Africa<sup>25</sup>**

Agri SA claims to have more than 200 agri-businesses, some 45 commodity organisations and nine provincial agricultural unions as members. Agri SA seeks to create a favourable environment within which it is possible for farmers, as entrepreneurs, to be financially independent. Agri SA sets out its vision as follows: 'To be a vital link in the agricultural industry. As dominant role-player on the African continent, we serve as a model of excellent service delivery for local and international agricultural industries... (W)e strive for the interests of our members while also taking into account the interests of others... A community of producers and businesses who work together enthusiastically, with communal interests setting the tone... Rural communities are once again stable and safe, and to the State agriculture is the indisputable engine for an African Renaissance.'

Agri SA claims to represent 31 000 large-scale and 30 000 small-scale commercial farmers. A large-scale farmer can have more than one farm. Smallholders with the motive to generate a profit out of their agricultural activities can affiliate with Agri SA (e.g. flower producers through the Flower Growers' Association). Provincial associations have the autonomy to categorise farmers into small- and large-scale farmers. Agri SA acts as the national mouthpiece for all farmers and organisations affiliated to it, and to negotiate a favourable financial, social and security position for farmers within the national economy.

Part-time farmers – people who engage in farming on a part-time basis – are not included in Agri SA figures for commercial farmers. However, many part-time farmers associate with provincial farmers' unions and as such they are included in Agri SA's figures for the farmers they represent.

According to Agri SA about half its members (for both small- and large-scale farmers) are black. Agri SA's constitution places no racial restrictions on union membership.

In addition to representing farmers' interests, Agri SA also represents the interests of

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<sup>25</sup> Most of the material for this section was obtained from <www.agriinfo.co.za>, and a submission made by Agri SA to the Committee on 4 July 2001.

farmers' cooperatives. This is because both the farmers' associations and agricultural cooperatives are organised and controlled by farmers to promote their interests. According to Agri SA it, '(p)erforms its task in full dependence on God Almighty and in obedience to the Constitution and other laws that were enacted in a democratic and inclusive manner and are implemented fairly. Agri SA manifests and addresses its representations in the interest of members on a factual and merit basis and without party political considerations.'

The highest decision-making body within Agri SA is the union's annual congress, where all three legs of organised agriculture are represented (provincial unions, the cooperative movement and commodity organisations).

Agri SA's Provincial Chamber accommodates the provincial agricultural unions affiliated to it; the Commodity Chamber accommodates commodity organisations affiliated to Agri SA; and the Agricultural Business Chamber accommodates approximately 90 cooperatives and agri-business associates of Agri SA.

The Agricultural Business Chamber has its own bi-annual congress, council and executive committee. The members of the Provincial Chambers have their own annual congress as well as general councils and executive committees. Likewise, members of the Commodity Chamber have their own structure with annual or bi-annual congresses, general councils and executive committees.

Agri SA's structures of authority are supported by twelve functional committees. These small three-person committees are elected annually on the basis of expertise and knowledge. Each committee is administered and managed by a functionary who has expert knowledge in a specific field. The twelve functional areas handled by the committees are: agricultural marketing, trade and industry; labour affairs; economic affairs; land affairs; safety and security; communication; farmer development; development and transfer of technology; water affairs; constitutional development; environmental affairs; and training.

Agri SA represents agriculture on a number of official bodies such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac), the National Training Council, and the Agricultural Research Council. Every farmer who is a member of an Agri SA affiliated farmers' association receives Agri SA's monthly newspaper '*Die Boer / The Farmer*'. Farmers are also informed of Agri SA news through radio bulletins on *Radio Sonder Grense*, 18 community radio stations, and Agri SA's website.

### **Transvaal Agricultural Union – South Africa<sup>26</sup>**

According to the Transvaal Agricultural Union – South Africa (TAU), the primary purpose of the union is to organise its members in a united front for the benefit of commercial agriculture as a profession, to preserve its members' cultural way of life, and to establish and maintain a safe and prosperous environment in which its members can continue with commercial farming and make a positive contribution to the country.

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<sup>26</sup> Most of the material for this section was obtained from <www.tlu.co.za>, and a submission made by the Transvaal Agricultural Union to the Committee on 20 June 2001.

A number of trade committees, organisations and unions specialising in agriculture, operate under the banner of the TAU.

According to the TAU its membership was around 6 000 to 7 000 in 2001. The TAU estimates there were approximately 40,000 commercial farmers in South Africa in 2001, excluding subsistence farmers, smallholders and farm managers who manage a farm for someone else. According to the TAU, if communal/subsistence farmers are included, there would be in the region of 150 000 – 200 000 ‘farmers’ in the country.

In respect of land reform the TAU favours a ‘willing buyer, willing seller’ process as the only fair, responsible and accountable way for the alienation of property. The TAU opposes any form of pressure on a property owner to force that person off his or her land.

The TAU bases its safety policy on the Biblical principle of self-protection. That is, everyone’s first responsibility is to protect their life, their family’s life, their property and to maintain peace. According to the TAU, this should be done within the framework of the South African constitution, in terms of which the State has an obligation to create an environment where everyone is safe from violence. The TAU supports the country’s security services in their goal to create a safe and stable environment.

The TAU is actively involved with rural safety and security issues and claims that it is, together with the Agricultural Employers’ Organisation (AEO), the driving force behind the organisation Action Stop Farm Attacks.

### **National African Farmers’ Union<sup>27</sup>**

The National African Farmers’ Union (NAFU) was established in 1991 for black farmers who had previously been excluded from mainstream agriculture. Before 1991 the only organisation which attempted to address the needs of black farmers at the national level was the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC), which facilitated the formation of the NAFU.

According to the NAFU, it had 45,000 members in 1998. However, because the NAFU could not provide all the services which farmers need its membership had decreased to some 20,000 members by 2001.

The focus of the NAFU is on advocacy. On behalf of its members the NAFU lobbies for access to critical resources such as land, credit, information, credit extension and other support services. The NAFU assists its members to expand their capacity and strength through effective communication, training, improving management skills and exposing its members to the latest and up-to-date production techniques.

The broad aims of the NAFU are to:

- lobby for policy reforms aimed at levelling the playing field in all agricultural matters

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<sup>27</sup> Much of the material for this section was obtained from a submission made by the NAFU to the Committee on 23 July 2001.

- with particular reference to land acquisition, agricultural funding, and market access;
- lobby for the provision of appropriate services;
- identify, quantify and address the needs of its members;
- facilitate the provision of training; and
- empower women and young people to enable them to participate fully in farming activities.

The NAFU claims to have members throughout South Africa who are structured in regional unions. The NAFU draws its members from a broad base, including farmers, agri-businesses (including companies, close corporations and trusts), farmers' organisations, corporations and individuals who support the NAFU's objectives and goals.

### **The Agricultural Employers' Organisation**

The Agricultural Employers' Organisation (AEO) was established in 1990. It is a non-profit organisation claiming to represent thousands of farmers countrywide. The AEO seeks to curb labour problems of agricultural employers. At the request of its members, the AEO's mandate includes giving attention to land affairs, and safety matters (the latter is done in conjunction with 'Action Stop Farm Attacks').

The mission of the AEO is to pro-actively enhance and protect the labour related interests of agricultural employers through training-, advice-, legal- and information services. According to the AEO it is a non-political organisation managed by a council of 11 members.

In May 2000 Action Stop Farm Attacks was established under the leadership of the AEO. The primary purpose of Action Stop Farm Attacks is to reduce and stop all farm attacks. At the time of writing the chairperson of the AEO is also the chairperson of Action Stop Farm Attacks.

According to Action Stop Farm Attacks, 'evidence strongly suggest that many farm attacks are a concerted effort to intimidate the farming community', which is why farm attackers 'do not merely intend killing their victims, but instead want to inflict pain, humiliation and suffering, especially on elderly people and women'.<sup>28</sup> A countrywide signature campaign launched by Action Stop Farm Attacks in May 2000, in protest against the high number of attacks on farmers, had collected 372,000 signatures within six months.<sup>29</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In general the farmers in South Africa are well organised. Although the agricultural unions

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<sup>28</sup> No author, *Action: Stop farm attacks*, <http://www.tlu.co.za/AKSIE%20STOP%20PLAASAANVALLE.htm>, (2003-01-13).

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Unequal Protection. The State's Response to Violent Crime on South African Farms* (compiled by Manby B., New York, 2001) p 245.

cannot nearly claim to represent all the farmers in the country, they wield enormous power. They are also very influential opinion formers. Any project relating to farm and rural safety cannot hope to succeed without the cooperation of the agricultural societies. It is a pity that there are three agricultural unions – Agri SA, the Transvaal Agricultural Union of South African and the National African Farmers Union – since their differences impede the effectiveness of the Rural Safety Plan.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See p 190.