

TRACTOR OWNERSHIP AND SERVICES IN RAYMOND MHLABA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, EASTERN CAPE

Raymond Mhlaba Farmers Association and UFH

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Introduction

From 8 to 17 June 2015, the Raymond Mhlaba Farmers Association, together with the Raymond Mhlaba Secondary Co-operative and the University of Fort Hare, conducted a survey of tractor owners in Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality.

The purpose of the survey was to establish the current state of tractor ownership in the area in the belief that:

- i) these tractors are a valuable asset that could be used to better effect to support local communities, both as part of and aside from existing government programmes, and
- ii) modest but targeted government support to these tractor owners could significantly improve the contribution they are able to make to local farming communities.

The specific objectives of the survey were to establish:

- the number of tractors in the area owned and operated by black farmers
- the working condition and possible repair needs and costs of these tractors
- the type of equipment owned by these farmers and the condition of that equipment
- the nature of the services offered by these farmers to other farmers in the area
- the skills development needs of the tractor owners.

It should be mentioned that the survey excluded tractors owned by group projects, on the grounds that these tractors are usually available only for use in their respective projects, and/or are not functioning at all. Also excluded were a small number of black tractor owners who have significant land of their own and who similarly use their tractors only for their own farming. Finally, the survey also excluded owners whose only tractors that were clearly beyond repair.



The tractor owners

Altogether 12 tractor owners were identified, 10 of whom own one tractor each, and two of whom own two, making a total of 14 tractors. Two of the 12 owners have registered businesses used as income entities. The other owners have no registered businesses but are in full operation. All the owners are men, the youngest of them 35 years old and the oldest is 88 years old. Education levels were more or less evenly split between those who have primary schooling only and those with secondary schooling.

Tractors and equipment

Table 1 summarises the information regarding the tractors and implements owned by the 12 owners surveyed.

Of the 14 tractors captured, seven are in perfect working order. One tractor (number 10) is running but is in need of some engine repairs and for now is unusable. The remaining 6 have of a range of minor problems that need attention but which at the moment do not prevent their active use in farming.

All but one of the tractor owners surveyed also had a fair amount of equipment, though the exact package varied from owner to owner. (Note that owners 7 and 11 are the ones with two tractors.) Unless otherwise noted, the implements are in full working order.

Table 1: Tractor types, tractor condition, and implements

Owner	Tractor type (year)	Repairs needed to tractor	Implements
1	Ferguson (1984)	Back and front tyres	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Planter
2	Ferguson 165 (1978)	Hydraulic system	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Planter Trailer
3	Tafe 7502	Fuel leak, no proper driver's seat	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Planter Cabbage planter Trailer Boom spray (needs repairs)
4	John Deere 5403	None	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Planter Cultivator
5	Ferguson 265	None	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Trailer
6	Ferguson 265	None	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Trailer

7	Ferguson 135 (1968) Ferguson 135 (1968)	None None	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Planter Cultivator Trailer
8	Ferguson 135	Hydraulic system, back and front tyres, driver's seat	
9	Foton 704	Hydraulic system	Disc plough (some discs need new bearings) Planter Cultivator
10	Ferguson 188	Starter problem	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Ripper Planter Fertiliser spreader Boom sprayer Trailer
11	Landini R5000 Landini Solis 90	None None	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Planter Boom sprayer Trailer Road grader
12	John Deer 2130	PTO in need of repairs	Mouldboard plough Disc plough Planter

Regarding the tractors that have mechanical or other problems, the survey team made a note of the problems and then went to parts suppliers in East London. **The approximate total cost for the necessary parts to repair the tractors is R70 000, while the cost of delivery and labour would be an additional R60 000.** Notably, none of the tractor owners has equipment suitable for conservation agriculture such as no-till planters.

Out of the 12 owners surveyed, 11 hire out their services to other farmers in the community. For the most part, the services they offer are the same, namely ploughing, discing, and planting. More than half of the owners also spray, despite most of these not owning their own sprayer. In addition, most of the tractor owners hire out their equipment. (This is how tractor owners without their own sprayer are able to spray on behalf of clients, i.e. because they hire from another owner.) Tables 2 summarises how many tractor owners provide which services and at what cost, while Table 3 does the same for implements hired out.

Table 2: Current prices for services rendered

Service	Number of owners providing	Price range (Rand per hectare)	Mean charge (Rand per hectare)
Ploughing	11	500-1200	R709
Discing	11	300-700	R393

Planting	11	200-400	R295
Spraying	7	400-450	R421

Table 3: Current prices for hiring out of implements

Implement	Number of owners providing	Price range (Rand per hectare)	Mean charge (Rand per hectare)
Plough	10	140-300	173
Disc	10	100-250	127
Planter	10	60-200	104
Sprayer	3	150-150	150

The prices vary, often considerably, for most of the services rendered. What determines these prices is unclear.

Training needed

All the surveyed owners are well aware of how to use their tractors and equipment, however 9 felt that they would benefit from more advanced training in ploughing skills, and 10 in tractor maintenance. The research team consulted the Fort Hare Traction Centre for prices on various types of training, and found that various five-day training modules were available, each costing **R5000 per participant**.

Conclusions

The findings of the survey support the notion that black-owned tractors in the area perform a useful function to the local farming community, despite an almost complete absence of government support for this function. It is reasonable to suppose that, with some support – whether in the form of assistance with minor repairs or training – these benefits could be felt more deeply and widely. One question that arises is whether these owners and their tractors could be used to change the manner in which existing government programmes function, not least Fetsa Tlala, the current cropping programme; in Raymond Mhlaba Municipality at least, the tractors services that contribute to Fetsa Tlala projects are sourced from outside the municipality.

Subsequent to completing the survey and sharing initial findings, numerous other tractor owners in Raymond Mhlaba Municipality have come forward wishing to be acknowledged. It may well be the case that there are two or three times as many tractors owned and operated by previously disadvantaged farmers in Raymond Mhlaba LM than are reflected in this report. Together we can do more.