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Going for broke: the fate of farm workers in arid South Africa

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Abstract:

South African agriculture has always been ideologically contested, because of its relationship with controversial land ownership issues. This book takes the question of farm workers' fortunes beyond the land debate, to consider their current and future livelihoods. The book argues that the question of farm workers needs to be understood as part of a broader spectrum of economic and social questions. Where should farm workers live? Should rural-urban migration be encouraged? What kind of job prospects can be fostered? How can their participation in the rural and peri-urban economy be promoted? Do farm workers need land, or jobs, or municipal services? Who should provide support to this neglected segment of society? A valuable study of past policy failures and future policy options, the book is primarily aimed at policy-makers and students of rural development. It is explicitly aimed at promoting new approaches, synergies and partnerships amongst stakeholders, including government, commercial farmers, agricultural co-operatives, municipalities, training agencies, and farm worker trade unions. The book also offers suggestions that transcend the South African rural experience. It can therefore serve as a case study for students and practitioners of rural development elsewhere in the developing world.

Keywords:

FARM WORKERS

FARMING

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Doreen Atkinson's book on the fate of farm workers and dwellers in South Africa is a highly relevant and very welcome publication. Among the poor, marginalised groups in South Africa, this one has received the least attention from policy-makers so far, and it is precisely to the latter that Atkinson addresses her work. One can only hope that the public debate on the plight of farm workers and dwellers that briefly erupted in South Africa following the murder of Eugene Terreblanche will trigger a more enduring interest in the issue among policy-makers at different levels of government.