



A level playing field? Improving market availability and access for small scale producers in Johannesburg, South Africa

Tang Mun Bbun ^{a,1}, Alec Thornton ^{a,b,*}

^a University of New South Wales, POB 7916, Canberra BC ACT 2610, Australia

^b School of GAES, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

A B S T R A C T

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Rapid urbanisation has resulted in an increase in urban poverty in the developing world. In response, some governments in developing nations are increasingly considering urban agriculture to combat poverty. However, understandings of formal intervention to link small scale urban food producers to urban markets are still limited. This paper will present findings from a tentative study of the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market; a farmers' market located in Johannesburg, Gauteng province, South Africa. Results from a survey of urban farmers suggest that a free market economy may not provide equal benefit between large and small scale urban producers. Key findings reveal that beneficial relationships and risk-sharing mechanisms are key for urban producers to access this urban market.

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Introduction

Literature on urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) has been growing since the 1980s, beginning with debates on the general concepts of UPA, such as its definition, to applied studies of resource access at the pre-production phase and market access at the post-production phase (Mougeot, 2000; Rogerson, 1993; Thornton, 2008, 2009). Interest in UPA is increasing as a result of price fluctuations for basic food staples, inequalities in agro-food networks and persistent poverty, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Kneafsey, 2010). As a point of contrast, in developed countries, the reality of increasing costs of food and related inadequacies of the global food system has led to increasing interest in assessing local food production or 'food shed analysis' in the past decade (Kremer & DeLiberty, 2011). In addition, interest in sustainable urban food production in cities in the 'global north' is further driven by the need to improve access and availability of low-cost nutritious food for food insecure households (Metcalf & Widener, 2011). Analyses of local 'food sheds' are beginning to show signs of life in developing countries, where some government and city officials are beginning to reconsider locating food production and markets along the peri-urban fringe and within the built-up urban environment for poverty alleviation, as well as to increase market

production (Thornton, Nel, & Hampwaye, 2010). Academics, researchers and policy makers concerned with UPA in the developing world have identified a need for improved understandings of the role of institutions in promoting UPA production through formal market access (Nel, Hampwaye, Thornton, Rogerson, & Marais, 2009; Thornton et al., 2010). In South Africa, food markets are part of a national scheme to encourage market participation of small scale producers through improving informal–formal market linkages. This paper will discuss tentative results from an applied study of the role of institutions in establishing urban food markets for income generation and poverty alleviation through a case study of the JFPM in Gauteng province, South Africa. The JFPM case study will specifically focus on formal market access for informal small scale UPA producers in the Johannesburg metropolitan area, which is the most populated and economically and socially unequal urban centre in South Africa (Beall, Crankshaw, & Parnell, 2000).

The JFPM is located about 6 km to the South-east of Johannesburg central business district (CBD) in Gauteng province, and a range of public transport, such as 'bakkies' (local parlance for light utility vehicle, or 'pick-up truck') and mini-bus taxis, serves the route from the CBD to the market and vice-versa (Figs. 1 and 2). Moreover, the market is conveniently situated near the M1 and M2 highways, which run North–South and East–West respectively. For these reasons, the JFPM is easily accessible from all directions of the Johannesburg metropolitan area. In view of the fact that Gauteng is much more urbanised than any other South African province, the cultivation and marketing of food crops, non-food produce and livestock within Gauteng province are considered as UPA activities.

* Corresponding author. University of New South Wales, POB 7916, Canberra BC ACT 2610, Australia. Tel.: +61 2 6268 8309.

E-mail addresses: munbbun.tang@hotmail.com (T. Mun Bbun), a.thornton@unsw.edu.au (A. Thornton).

¹ Tel.: +65 6449 1060.



Fig. 1. Map of Southern Africa.

Who are the urban farmers in Gauteng?

Similar to previous studies of urban agriculture in South Africa (Rogerson, 1993, 1998, 2003; Thornton, 2008, 2009; Webb, 1998), Gauteng urban farmers tend to be black, elderly, unemployed or retired and depend on food production for household consumption with some market production. Discussed in Section 4.1, below, social welfare grants appear to provide important sources of income for poor households that may have contributed to the limited impact and spatial extent of UPA, as compared to other African cities (Thornton, 2008, 2009). Urban farmers largely operate as individuals, where UPA is more of a household coping strategy than a bulk food production system that can keep up with market demand (Thornton, 2008). For Gauteng and the city of Johannesburg, the fragmented style of urban production is a concern, as it constrains the ability of farmers to effectively participate in the JFPM. Attempts to overcome these constraints are part of the Department of Economic Development's Urban Agri-Business Strategy and Implementation Plan to 'invigorate farming' in Johannesburg (Nkosi, 2009). This department has identified vacant and fertile government land in the Roodepoort and Orange regions, where small scale production pre-exists, as having the potential to develop as centres of economically viable farming in peri-urban Johannesburg, with small scale producers acting collectively as 'communal cooperatives' to share the risk in meeting JFPM consumer demands for quality produce, and doing so in bulk (Nkosi, 2009). The extent that 'communal cooperatives' of peri-urban food production can be a beneficial system for small scale producers and contribute to the local food supply is the subject of a continuing study by the authors.

UPA market access in South Africa

Observers indicate that the inequalities of UPA in poverty alleviation in South Africa do not only occur at the production phase, but also at the marketing phase (Louw, Vermeulen, Kirsten, & Madevu, 2007; Louw, Vermeulen, & Madevu, 2006; Tschirley, 2007). The recent rise in market share of fresh produce procurement by supermarkets in South Africa has increased the barriers to market access for small scale UPA producers (Tschirley, 2007). The determining factor here is the capability of small scale urban producers to consistently supply quality produce and meet the supermarkets' large scale of procurement (Weatherspoon & Reardon, 2003). Although institutional support for formalising UPA through the establishment of urban markets is increasing in South Africa, this support often struggles to translate into positive economic benefits for small scale UPA producers (Bediako & Debrah, 2007; Louw et al., 2006, 2007). In addition, numerous observers highlight that there is a lack of in-depth research on market access as a key component of UPA that is alleviating poverty unevenly (Cohen & Garrett, 2009; Nel et al., 2009).

The concept of a farmers' market is an example of an institutional response that links informal UPA activities to the formal market. These markets act as a focal point, providing a formal, common trading ground for all retailers, consumers and informal UPA producers (National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) 1998, 2002, 2006). In this manner, farmers' markets can reduce redundancies and inefficiencies associated with fragmented markets. With careful planning and management, a farmers' market can assist in reducing the inequalities associated with free market access by increasing the benefits to small scale farmers

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