

Tobacco farming in South Africa is estimated to contribute only 1% of the total farmworker labour force (Stats SA, 2017).

Tobacco farming has been shown to have negative effects on the environment, farmworkers, and farmers themselves.



Employment Contribution

In South Africa, there are no reliable estimates of the number of farm workers employed in tobacco agriculture (Egbe, 2019).

In 2017, the tobacco industry reported employing 8,000 to 10,000 farm workers, approximately 1% of the country's total of 757,628 workers involved in all forms of agriculture (Stats SA, 2017).



Environmental Impact

Tobacco farming harms the environment by causing deforestation that threatens plant and animal biodiversity, as well as through the leaching of soil nutrients and the spilling of toxic pesticides and fertilisers into soil and water systems (WHO, 2017; Slaughter et al., 2020).



Farmer Exploitation

The tobacco industry often presents tobacco farming as a lucrative economic endeavour for vulnerable smallholder farmers. Tobacco farming, however, is a challenging livelihood for most smallholder farmers in countries like Malawi (Makoka, 2017; Appau et al., 2020).

Many tobacco farmers face financial distress after signing contracts, something which is compounded by climate change and high input prices (Wineman et al., 2022).

Many tobacco farmers struggle with low profits (Lencucha et al., 2017).

The tobacco industry benefits from unpaid child labour (Kulik et al., 2017).

Some tobacco CEOs earn millions, while many farmers struggle to survive (Magati et al., 2019).



Switching to Alternative Crops

Globally, farmers are switching from tobacco to growing other, more profitable crops, despite tobacco industry claims that there are no economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco for small-scale farmers (Akhter et al., 2014).

Case Studies:

- Economic returns of tobacco are often lower than alternative crops in Uganda (Ilukor et al., 2022).
- Kenya has had great success in supporting the switch to alternative crops with their "Tobacco-Free Farms" initiative (Clarck et al., 2020).



Tobacco executives salaries can be
76,000 Times
the average Malawian tobacco farmer.

