

BACKGROUND & MOTIVATIONS

- South Africa’s table-grape sector is highly export-oriented and extensively certified, with private standards playing a central role in access to international markets.
- Yet seasonal farmworkers remain particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, linked to unstable employment, fluctuating incomes and limited year-round food access.
- Existing certification primarily governs production, food safety and labour compliance, while food security is generally treated as an indirect rather than explicitly measured outcome.

90%
Share of SA table grapes exported globally

70%
Combined market share destined for the EU and UK

R15 Billion
Gross Value of Production

104,000+
Total employment (90,247 seasonal workers)





FSS
FOOD SECURITY STANDARD

WORKS ALONGSIDE EXISTING STANDARDS:
GLOBALG.A.P. • GRASP • SIZA • Fairtrade



RESEARCH QUESTION

Could the Food Security Standard (FSS) constitute a viable governance instrument for addressing food security vulnerabilities within South Africa’s table grape value chain?

RQ1 Industry–Food Security Relationship

RQ2 FSS Relevance and Applicability

RQ3 FSS Integration and Structural Constraint

METHODOLOGY / DATA COLLECTION

1 Expert Interviews
Mapped governance actors & key issues

2 Exploratory Survey
assessing food security, employment, governance & coping strategies.

3 Focus Group Discussion
interpreted survey findings & identified priorities

4a Individual Interviews
Lived experiences, coping strategies & stakeholder perspectives

4b Participatory Net-Map
Actor relationships, accountability & perceived influence

Actor that took part in the research step

Academics	Farmworkers	Unions
Exporters	Certification Bodies	NGOs



RESULTS

WORKER FOOD-SECURITY OUTCOMES

ECONOMIC

- 38.9% Low wages
- 33.3% Rising food prices

EMPLOYMENT

- 32.5 no contract
- 10.0% unsure of contractual status

INSTITUTIONAL

- UIF delays and Limited social protection
- 40.0% rely on government support

SPATIAL / WORKPLACE

- Distance from supermarkets
- Lack of food infrastructure

CHRONIC FOOD STRESS
CSI ≈ 31

38/40 Reduced meal frequency

37/40 Relied on friends or relatives

38/40 Bought food on credit or borrowed food/money

16/40 Went an entire day without eating

HEIGHTENED VULNERABILITY AMONG SEASONAL WORKERS

- Employment instability
- weaker institutional protection
- poorer living conditions

The Governance Gap

A highly governed, export-oriented and certified sector, yet governance can stop at compliance.

PUBLIC REGULATION

- Labour law
- Minimum Wage
- Working conditions

BUYERS / RETAILERS

- Market requirements
- Audit Indicators

PRIVATE CERTIFICATION

- GLOBALG.A.P.
- SIZA
- Fairtrade

45% of surveyed workers could not identify any certification used on their farm.

Despite extensive regulation and certification, stakeholders described food security as largely **assumed rather than explicitly assessed**.

Audits focus on labour and social compliance, while workers’ actual access to adequate and nutritious food remains **weakly monitored**



Power, Voice & the FSS

The Governance Paradox
Power, Support and Participation Do Not Align

ACTOR INFLUENCE

Most		
Bosses	28/40	
Least		
Workers	17/40	
Women	17/40	

Influence follows control over wages, contracts, and employment.

POWER ON PAPER vs POWER IN PRACTICE

Paper	Practice
Government Auditors SATI	Bosses Supervisors Labour Brokers

Influence follows control over income, employment, and resources.

SUPPORT & VOICE

Most Support	
NGOs	13/40
Unions	12/40
More Voice Needed	
Workers	15/40
Women	13/40

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE FSS

ANALYTICAL LENS – ACADEMIC & POLICY EXPERTS

- Food security remains a blind spot, Structural vulnerabilities extend beyond farm-level compliance.
- FSS → Could make hidden food-security vulnerabilities visible and measurable

ADVOCACY LENS – WORKER & CIVIL SOCIETY

- Food insecurity persists despite formal labor protections
- FSS → Could strengthen worker-centered protection and accountability

PRAGMATIC LENS – INDUSTRY & CERTIFICATION ACTORS

- Food security is not explicitly monitored by existing systems
- FSS → Promising complement, but it must fit within established standards and auditing structures

CONCLUSIONS

RQ1 Export employment ≠ food security
Food insecurity reflects economic access and livelihood instability rather than food availability. It should therefore be understood as a livelihood outcome, not simply as a consequence of employment.

RQ2 FSS addresses a governance gap
The FSS amoves beyond audit “snapshots” of compliance. It is considered relevant and applicable as an add-on to existing certification systems

RQ3 FSS has potential, but implementation matters
Greater visibility of worker food security could strengthen governance, while costs, audit fatigue and limited buyer incentives may constrain adoption. Downstream retail pressure can further limit producers’ capacity to improve worker conditions.

The FSS can constitute a viable governance instrument by making worker food security an explicit and accountable outcome. Its success, however, depends on meaningful implementation, incentives for adoption, and shared responsibility across the value chain from producers and certification systems to buyers and retailers