

# **Stumbling from Correctional Walls to Rural Halls: A Unique *Journey* from Farming and Corrections to Academia in Rural Crime and Livestock Theft**

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### To My Grandsons: Declan, Wian, Marco<sup>1</sup>

“Life is the most difficult exam. Many people fail because they try to copy others, not realizing that everyone has a different question paper.” *Unknown*

#### Introduction to the Roads Treaded in the Working and Academic World

My research journey began with a deep-rooted interest in understanding the complexities of corrections and criminal justice. My extensive tenure within the Department of Correctional Services, where I held various positions, nurtured this interest, ultimately leading to my role as the Assistant Head of Baviaanspoort Maximum Prison.

In 1989, I was transferred to the Correctional Service Head Office to train correctional officers in functional and managerial areas of correctional services. A significant aspect of this role involved collaborating with higher education institutions in South Africa to enhance higher education for correctional officers. In 1992, I had the opportunity to be transferred to Technikon (Applied Technology Institute.), South Africa, as a lecturer in correctional management.

It is vital to understand the difference between a Technikon and a university. A Technikon focuses on (a) the training and practice of technology, including its development, and (b) vocational preparation for specific occupations. In contrast, a university emphasises (a) training and practice in science (broadly defined to encompass all scholarly activities), including research, and (b) mainly general vocational preparation. This appointment as a lecturer allowed me to travel internationally, amongst others, to the USA, Canada, and the UK. It gave me a global perspective and a broad understanding of the field. The essence is that in my early academic career, the focus was not theory-orientated. In 2003, Technikon SA and the University of South Africa merged to create a dedicated, comprehensive, open distance and e-learning university. Subsequently, there was an inherent force to enhance research and theory as per the definition of a university.

During these endeavours, 1992 -2003, one day in Chicago, while visiting the late Dr. Jess Maghan, a respected figure in the field of criminal justice, I coincidentally stumbled across Brian Tkachuk, a renowned figure in prison reform. This meeting was a pivotal moment in my research journey, as it allowed me to work in various African countries, conducting technical needs assessments and enhancing the correctional profession across the Anglo part of the continent. My first-hand experience highlighted numerous areas requiring empirical research and policy changes to improve the effectiveness and humanity of disciplinary practices. In our endeavours

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<sup>1</sup> This article is dedicated to my three grandsons (Declan, Wian, and Marco). In this article, I offer to them and to everyone some grandfatherly advice.

in Africa to assess needs, we conducted informal research studies within the prison visited. A typical practice when visiting prisons in Africa is that all inmates sit in rows in the courtyard. As researchers, we engaged inmates, informally asked about demographics, and gathered data on their age, length of sentence, and the offences committed. This approach was informal and unstructured and aimed to understand the demographic and criminal profiles of the incarcerated population, offering insights into the diversity of offences and the varying lengths of sentences. An observation specifically in the countries in east and southern Africa was the number of people serving sentences for livestock theft and the observation that they ranged from a young age (sixteen) to the most elder (seventy plus) of the prisoner population. Although these observations were never recorded, however, they stuck in the mind – and filed in a drawer for later.

The travel endeavours in the USA also allowed me to meet and engage with three specific individuals: Dr. Linda Zupan, Dr. Greg Warchol, and Professor Bob Hanson of Northern Michigan University, all involved in criminal justice research. They were also interested in Africa and persuaded me to explore environmental crimes, a unique and intriguing aspect of my research, explicitly focusing on the illegal wildlife trade.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout this academic journey, I remained a farm boy in constant contact with the soil and agriculture, exploring both areas of passion. My passion for agriculture and advocacy regarding policies, etc., led me to various positions in the red meat value chain in South Africa. The red meat value chain in South Africa is also responsible for livestock theft prevention, and in 2008, I became involved in the Gauteng Provincial Livestock Theft Prevention Forum (GSTPF). Still exploring the endeavours in wildlife crime, I was exposed to discussions and debates relative to livestock theft regularly in meetings and later attended national meetings. I was reading some of the objectives of the Forum, and amongst others, the following: (a) evaluating existing policies, legislation, strategies, and procedures for controlling and preventing livestock theft, law enforcement and penalty imposition, and recommending adjustments; (b) based on the results of prevention and control actions and information on the occurrence and trends of livestock theft, making recommendations to protect livestock producers against losses due to livestock theft; and (c) identifying research needs, allocating priorities, and formulating recommendations.

A flash light about the travels and prisons in Africa took me back to the prison visits, informal questions, and observations, where I realized that this crime against farms is significant in Africa. On a good day in 2012, I talked with an editor of a widespread agricultural magazine in South Africa about my wildlife crimes research and the information discussed in the National Livestock Theft Prevention Forum (NSTPF) meetings. He requested that I write four articles' of

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<sup>2</sup> Read more in Warchol, G. (2017). *Exploiting the wilderness: An analysis of wildlife crimes*. Temple University Press.

1500 words for his popular magazine. I agreed, but I was still haphazardly stuck in wildlife crimes. A fellow academic and later co-author, Professor Anthony Minnaar, read the articles and persuaded me to turn the articles in the popular magazine into a scholarly article published as “The Extend of Livestock Theft in South Africa”.<sup>3</sup>

In the exploration of academic material for this article, I became aware of the research area of rural criminology, and in the literature review, I was exposed to names such as Elaine Barclay (University of New England, New South Wales), Joe Donnermeyer (The Ohio State University), Water DeKeseredy (West Virginia University), and Robert Smith (University of the West of Scotland), to name a few, and many others. Furthermore, in these travelling and networking opportunities, exposure developed to criminological theories. A colleague, Professor Herbig, who was involved in environmental criminology, was introduced to Dr. Warchol, and they wrote a paper addressing routine activities theory, which further informed my knowledge regarding the theory and the direction of rural criminology (Herbig & Warchol, 2011).

### **Drift to Rural Criminology**

The switch from corrections to wildlife led to the discovery of a new world of rural criminology. In 2015, I submitted a paper on livestock theft. However, peer reviewers suggested that the manuscript be split into two distinct papers: one with a practical approach to the role of social media in preventing livestock theft, and the other with a theoretical examination of the locations where these crimes occurred. As a result, I published two papers on the topic. The first focused on using social media for livestock theft prevention, while the second explored applying criminology theories to this issue (Clack, 2015a; Clack, 2015b). The criminology theories examined in the paper were environmental and place-based, specifically routine activities theory, crime pattern theory, rational choice theory, and the buffer zone principle. Alongside the work of Herbig & Warchol (2011), this paper sparked my interest in various theories of rural crime. However, it did not entirely convince me to shift my focus to rural criminology.

Moreover, in 2015, the NSTPF elected me as the National Chairperson of the Forum. In 2016, the Director of the School for Criminal Justice, on a road trip to Swaziland, instructed me to organise an international conference. The funding for the conference was slim, and I approached the Red Meat Producers Organisation (RPO) of South Africa to sponsor three keynote speakers for the First International Rural Crime Conference in Africa in September 2017. The three keynotes were Joe Donnermeyer, Elaina Barclay, and Emmanuel Bunei (previously, Moi University in Kenya and now the University of New England, New South Wales). On the first day of the conference, Joe gave me a copy of the book he edited titled *The Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology* (Donnermeyer, 2016). It still has an

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<sup>3</sup> Clack, W. (2013). The Extent of Livestock Theft in South Africa. *Acta Criminologica*, 26(2), 77–91.

honorary place on my desk. It is a magnificent reference guide for starting an academic journey into any topic related to rural crime, and it hooked me on rural criminology.

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Their Influence for My Drifting into Rural Criminology**

An awakening while in the drift to rural criminology revealed that defining "rural" is both challenging and crucial for researching rural crime, as it provides the essential context for understanding the unique social dynamics and structural characteristics that set rural areas apart (Rennison & Mondragon, 2022). The challenges are due to the vast variability in rural settings, encompassing everything from different continents, remoteness, and sparsely populated regions to small towns near urban centres. Such heterogeneity means that a one-size-fits-all definition is inadequate, as rural communities over continents and regions differ markedly in social structures, economic conditions, and cultural contexts, affecting the relevance of criminological theories and the design of crime prevention strategies (Donnermeyer, 2020). For example, Chabal (2009) highlights that concepts and terms are not universally applicable but are generated within local, historical, and contextual frameworks. The definitions of concepts such as "rural," "farmer," "cattle theft," and "violence against women" exhibit variations across regions, cultures, and communities. The complexity arises from the diverse social, cultural, economic, political, and historical circumstances that shape the understanding of these concepts. For instance, Africa's term "farmer" encompasses individuals engaged in any form of agricultural production, irrespective of land size (Bunei & Barasa, 2017). In South Africa, the rural safety strategy (SAPS, 2018) defines "rural" comprehensively, extending beyond the common notions of small size and remoteness. This definition considers the country's historical development during the colonial and apartheid eras. In essence, as Donnermeyer, (2020), humorously suggests that more than one 'paracetamol' is needed when defining rural. Therefore, each research paper needs to describe rural criminological studies within the context of various social dynamics and structural characters.

Throughout my extensive global travels, I have witnessed rural life's unique challenges and intricacies across various continents. These experiences have deepened my understanding of the diverse socio-economic landscapes characterising rural communities worldwide. Similarly, my involvement in academic peer reviews has allowed me to explore rural areas in Africa, Russia, and beyond. The rural crimes prevalent in these regions, while sharing certain commonalities, often reflect the distinct cultural and socio-political contexts in which they occur. This exposure has underscored the diversity of rural crime, illuminating how local circumstances shape the nature and impact of criminal activities in rural settings. This rich tapestry of rural life and crime, spanning continents, continues to inform and enrich my academic pursuits and research.

Placing rural into context was a challenge due to all the paracetamols taken, but then came the theoretical difficulties, resulting in my need to be beware of becoming addicted to

paracetamol as Donnermeyer (2020) humorously mentioned. Environmental and place-based theories – routine activities, crime patterns, rational choice, and buffer zones, although all developed in urban settings – fit neatly into accessing livestock theft and criminalising the crime (Clack, 2015). After receiving and delving into *The Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology* (Donnermeyer, 2016), particularly the chapters on "Civic Community and Violence in Rural Communities" (Doucet & Lee, 2014) and "Research on Social Disorganization Theory and Crime in Rural Communities" (Rogers & Pridemore, 2016) and a separate paper "The Social Organisation of the Rural and Crime in the United States: Conceptual Considerations" (Donnermeyer, 2015), I experienced a renewed imperative to critically evaluate the applicability of these theories to the South African context. These chapters underscore the complexities of rural crime and the critical role of community dynamics in influencing violence and disorganisation. Doucet and Lee's analysis of civic community provides a nuanced understanding of how social cohesion and collective efficacy can mitigate violence in rural areas. Meanwhile, Rogers and Pridemore's examination of social disorganisation theory highlights the importance of structural factors in understanding crime patterns.

Reflecting on these insights, it becomes evident that a thorough application and potential adaptation of these theoretical frameworks are essential for comprehensively addressing rural crime in South Africa. In "The Social Organization of the Rural and Crime in the United States: Conceptual Considerations," Donnermeyer comprehensively analyses the structural and cultural dimensions influencing crime in rural areas. He emphasises the unique social organisation of rural communities, which often includes close-knit social networks, higher levels of informal social control, and a strong sense of community. These characteristics can mitigate and exacerbate crime depending on economic stability, population changes, and community cohesion. Donnermeyer argues that traditional criminological theories often overlook the distinctiveness of rural settings and call for a more nuanced understanding that considers the interplay between social organisation and crime in these areas.

These three papers – Donnermeyer's analysis of rural crime, Doucet and Lee's study of civic community, and Rogers and Pridemore's examination of social disorganisation theory—collectively emphasise central themes such as social cohesion and community dynamics, informal social control, economic stability, community cohesion as a mitigating factor, and the adaptation of theoretical frameworks. These themes were crucial in informing my understanding of rural crime in context.

### **South Africa as a Rural Crime Study Area**

Critically evaluating South Africa, a country I have intimately known for over 60 years, it is essential to acknowledge the profound transformations in its rural landscape. Urbanisation has significantly altered rural areas, and the transition from apartheid to democracy has further contributed to these changes affecting the central themes of the three papers. These three papers

have significantly influenced my thinking regarding rural criminology in South Africa and, by extension, the African continent. They highlight the necessity of adapting theoretical frameworks to align with rural African communities' particular challenges and dynamics, ensuring that interventions are culturally relevant and practically effective.

### **Social Cohesion and Community Dynamic Changes**

The commercialisation of agriculture in South Africa has played a significant role in the country's urbanisation process (Stats SA, 2020). Commercial farming in South Africa has historically been state-subsidized and heavily regulated, allowing large-scale, predominantly white-owned farms to thrive. This has led to the displacement of many black South Africans from rural areas, as they were often denied access to land ownership and forced to work as farm labourers under a system of "paternalism." (Kheswa, 2015). The growth of commercial agriculture and the mechanisation of farming practices reduced the need for manual labour, driving many farm workers to seek employment opportunities in the country's urban centres (Stats SA, 2020). Furthermore, the profits generated by the booming commercial farming sector enabled investment in infrastructure and industries in urban areas, further attracting rural residents in search of economic opportunities. This influx of people from rural to urban areas has contributed to the rapid urbanisation of South Africa, with the country's urban population growing from around 52% in 1994 to over 66% today. Over the past few decades, the commercialisation of agriculture and other socioeconomic factors has thus been a significant driver of South Africa's urbanisation process. This process resulted in an overall reduction in employment creation in rural areas with poverty for those remaining in rural areas without jobs (du Toit, 2017).

### **Legislative Contribution to Social Cohesion Disturbances**

The Extension of Security of Tenure Act 62 of 1997 was enacted to enhance and secure long-term land tenure rights for individuals residing on certain lands and to correct the wrongs of the past (du Toit, 2017). This legislative measure provides a framework to facilitate and support long-term stability in land tenure through State assistance. It establishes comprehensive guidelines that regulate the conditions under which individuals may reside on specific lands and the procedures and circumstances under which these residency rights can be terminated. This legislation resulted in most farmers close to smaller rural towns requiring their labourers to move off the land and build houses. Consequently, labourers are daily transported from the small towns to farms and back.

## Civic Infrastructure and Civic Engagement

In rural South Africa, the deterioration of civic infrastructure and engagement poses a significant threat to communities' social and economic well-being, particularly in a democratic society. Institutions such as sports clubs, agricultural unions, educational schools, and churches have traditionally been the backbone of community cohesion and support. However, these pillars are increasingly under strain, exacerbating issues related to crime and social instability.

Once vibrant centres of community engagement and youth development, sports clubs are often neglected due to insufficient funding and resources. This neglect diminishes their capacity to provide structured, positive activities for young people, leaving them vulnerable to the lure of criminal activities. The absence of solid sports programs removes a crucial outlet for energy and creativity, increasing the likelihood of youth involvement in crime.

Agricultural unions, which play a critical role in advocating for farmers' rights and economic stability, face challenges from declining membership and limited resources. The weakening of these unions reduces their ability to collectively address economic insecurities that can drive individuals toward illegal activities. Farmers are left isolated and more susceptible to criminal acts like theft and livestock rustling without robust support networks. Additionally, rather than consolidating efforts to address these challenges, new organisations tend to be established, leading to numerous agricultural unions. This fragmentation dilutes the collective power of the unions, reducing their overall effectiveness and creating competition for already limited resources.

Educational schools, fundamental to shaping the future of rural youth, are often plagued by inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a lack of qualified teachers. The deterioration of educational facilities leads to lower educational outcomes, limiting opportunities for young people and increasing the risk of criminal behaviour. A lack of quality education undermines the social fabric of rural communities, creating environments where crime can thrive.

Traditionally pillars of moral and ethical guidance, churches suffer from reduced attendance and support. In a democratic society, where freedom of association is a right, the decline in church engagement signifies a loss of community solidarity and spiritual support. Like agricultural unions, rather than addressing internal challenges, new churches tend to be established. This proliferation of churches often leads to a fragmentation of congregations, weakening the community's ability to collectively address social issues such as poverty, unemployment, and substance abuse, all of which contribute to crime.

The overall deterioration of civic structures in rural South Africa underscores the challenges faced in maintaining a cohesive and functional democratic society. As these



institutions weaken, the social fabric of rural communities unravels, creating a fertile ground for crime and social unrest. Establishing new organisations instead of addressing existing challenges further exacerbates these issues by fragmenting efforts and resources. Strengthening civic infrastructure and engagement is essential to reversing this trend. By investing in sports clubs, agricultural unions, educational schools, and churches and fostering a culture of collaboration rather than fragmentation, rural communities can rebuild their social cohesion, provide alternatives to crime, and promote a safer, more stable environment for all residents.

### **Small Business Climate**

Doucet & Lee, (2014, p. 20) mentions that “a vibrant small business climate is beneficial to the welfare of communities”. Interrogating this, though, in my mind, in South Africa is challenging and personal in experience. In the 1990s, rural businesses in South Africa were predominantly owned by locals, and large agriculture corporations were established in favour of the agricultural community and small towns. These enterprises formed the backbone of local economies, providing jobs, services, and a sense of community ownership and pride. However, this landscape has shifted dramatically over the past couple of decades. Many small towns have become ghost towns, and foreign nationals increasingly own the remaining businesses from countries such as China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

This transformation has profound implications for rural South African communities. The influx of foreign-owned businesses has led to economic and social shifts that often foster resentment and xenophobia among local populations. Local business owners, unable to compete with the often lower prices and different business practices of foreign nationals, have been driven out of the market. This has resulted in losing local control and influence over these small towns' economic and social dynamics.

The economic income these businesses generate now often benefits the foreign nationals who own them rather than the local community. Profits are frequently sent back to the owners' home countries or reinvested in ways that do not directly benefit the local population. This shift has contributed to a rise in poverty levels among local residents, as the economic advantages once enjoyed by the community are siphoned away.

The presence of foreign-owned businesses has also altered the social fabric of these rural areas. With local businesses closing, communities lose vital gathering spaces and personal connections with locally-owned enterprises. The cultural and social ties that bind communities together weaken, leading to increased social fragmentation and tension (Farisani, 2022).

Furthermore, the dominance of foreign-owned businesses in rural South Africa has exacerbated xenophobic attitudes and conflicts (Olofinbiyi, 2022). Local populations often view foreign nationals with suspicion and hostility, perceiving them as competitors for scarce

economic resources and opportunities. This has led to incidents of violence and discrimination, further destabilising already vulnerable communities.

South African rural communities' socio-economic and historical specificities necessitate a tailored approach, integrating established theories with localised knowledge to develop effective crime prevention and intervention strategies. According to Donnermeyer (2015), what is deemed disorganised in one culture may be viewed as organised in another; this is also true in Africa. This perspective underscores the importance of contextualising criminological theories within the unique cultural and social landscapes of rural South Africa.

### **Ideal Research Focus with Unlimited Resources: Rural Crime in South Africa**

Given my deep familiarity with South Africa and its evolving rural landscape, my ideal research focus, with unlimited resources, would be investigating rural crimes through a multi-dimensional approach (i.e, rural crime patterns, preventions strategies, geospatial analysis, policy and legal analyses, technological innovations) . This research would aim to understand the complexities and root causes of criminal activities in rural areas, considering the impact of urbanisation, commercialisation, legislative changes, and civic infrastructure.

### **Understanding the Impact of Urbanization and Commercialization on Rural Crime**

Urbanisation and the commercialisation of agriculture have profoundly altered rural South Africa. The shift from locally-owned businesses to foreign-owned enterprises, alongside the mechanisation of farming, has led to significant socioeconomic changes. This research would investigate how these transformations contribute to rural crime, including property crimes, theft, and livestock rustling. By analysing the relationship between economic shifts and crime rates, the study would aim to identify patterns and trends that could inform targeted crime prevention strategies. For instance, the displacement of farm workers due to mechanisation and the subsequent migration to urban areas might correlate with increased crime rates in rural and urban settings.

### **Evaluating the Effects of Legislative Measures on Rural Crime**

Legislative measures such as the Extension of Security of Tenure Act 62 of 1997 have significantly affected land tenure and labour mobility in rural areas. This research will explore how these policies impact criminal activities, including land disputes, squatting, and theft. Specifically, the study could assess whether the Act inadvertently increases crime by disrupting traditional land use and labour practices. Using conflict theory, the research will examine how these legislative changes have intensified conflicts over land tenure and contributed to criminal behaviours like land disputes and theft. Employing Strain Theory, the study will investigate how

the disruption of traditional land use and labour practices has caused economic and social strain among rural populations, potentially leading to higher crime rates.

### **Revitalising Civic Infrastructure to Address Rural Crime**

The deterioration of civic infrastructure and engagement in rural areas – affecting sports clubs, agricultural unions, educational institutions, and churches – has likely contributed to rising crime rates. This research could theoretically use social disorganisation theory or social learning theory to assess how the decline of these community institutions correlates with criminal activities. For example, neglecting sports clubs and educational schools may lead to a lack of positive youth engagement, increasing vulnerability to criminal behaviour. The study would propose strategies to revitalise these institutions and enhance their role in crime prevention. This could involve developing community programs, improving infrastructure, and strengthening local organisations to foster a more cohesive and supportive environment.

### **Supporting Local Businesses and Combatting Crime Related to Economic Displacement**

The shift from local to foreign-owned businesses has disrupted rural economies and contributed to rising crime, including shoplifting and fraud. Research would focus on how the dominance of foreign businesses impacts local crime rates and the socio-economic tensions driving criminal activities. By examining the effects of economic displacement on crime, the study would seek to identify ways to support local businesses and restore economic stability. This might involve initiatives to bolster local entrepreneurship and create economic opportunities that reduce crime driven by poverty and economic frustration.

### **Addressing Xenophobia and Social Tensions in Crime Prevention**

The presence of foreign-owned businesses has exacerbated xenophobic attitudes, which in turn can lead to violence and discrimination. Research would investigate how xenophobia contributes to rural crime and social unrest. This study would aim to understand the links between xenophobic sentiment and criminal activities, such as hate crimes and property vandalism. It would also explore community-based interventions to promote social cohesion and reduce crime. Strategies could include fostering dialogue between local and foreign business owners and implementing programs to address the underlying causes of xenophobia.

## **Conclusion**

My research journey has traversed a rich and varied landscape, from the inner workings of correctional services to the complexities of rural criminology. Through extensive global travels and in-depth local observations, I have developed a nuanced understanding of the

intersection between crime, socio-economic changes, and community dynamics in rural South Africa. This multifaceted approach has underscored the need to adapt criminological theories to the unique context of South African rural communities.

The impact of urbanisation, commercialisation of agriculture, legislative measures, and the deterioration of civic infrastructure presents a complex web of factors influencing rural crime. My research ideals highlight how these factors may contribute to rising crime rates, from property theft and livestock theft to xenophobia-driven violence. The shift from local to foreign-owned businesses and the consequent economic displacement further exacerbate these issues, creating a pressing need for targeted and contextually relevant crime prevention research and development of strategies.

A critical evaluation of rural crime theories reveals the necessity of integrating local knowledge with established criminological frameworks. Social disorganisation, routine activities, and crime pattern theory offer valuable insights but must be adapted to reflect South African rural areas' unique socio-cultural and economic realities. This tailored approach would ensure that interventions are practical and culturally sensitive, enhancing their effectiveness.

Given unlimited resources, my ideal research focus would delve deeper into these dimensions, aiming to unravel the intricate relationships between socio-economic changes and crime. By investigating the effects of urbanisation, legislative measures, and civic infrastructure decline on rural crime and supporting local businesses while addressing xenophobia, this research could develop comprehensive strategies to mitigate crime and foster safer, more resilient communities.

Ultimately, understanding and addressing rural crime in South Africa requires a holistic and dynamic approach that considers the interplay of various factors and integrates theoretical insights with practical solutions. Through continued research and collaboration, we can develop more effective strategies to combat rural crime, promote social cohesion, and enhance the well-being of rural communities across South Africa and beyond.

However, I would have neglected my duty if I had not acknowledged the support of three esteemed colleagues who served as department chairs during the years that shaped my endeavours. Foremost among them was my dear friend Professor (Dr) Johan Kriel, who accompanied me on this journey since 1979 and whose passing in 2020 was a significant loss. His unwavering friendship and guidance were invaluable, and his words, "Never use the words I cannot achieve it". I also thank Professor (Dr) Nicolien Mullins, a friend and supporter since 1992, and Professor (Dr) Phumudzo Muthaphuli, a steadfast ally since 2008.

A journey never truly begins at the age of 17 or 18. It is shaped by the people who touch our lives long before that. For me, several significant figures influenced my development in both

school and agriculture. My grandfather and name bearer, Willie van der Merwe, instilled in me the values and traditions guiding my path. My father, Charles, whose presence I felt sincerely even though he passed away when I was just ten, left an indelible mark on my heart. My mother, Marthie, with her unwavering strength and love, provided the foundation I needed to grow. Marius Greyling, my livestock science teacher, imparted knowledge and a passion for the field. My father-in-law, Gideon Nel and “Oom” Dolf Erasmus, with their wisdom in social skills and farming, taught me lessons far beyond the classroom.

And then, there is my rock, my wife Jolinda. Her unselfish support and understanding have allowed me to navigate the demanding worlds of farming and academia. Our children, Lindy and Marle, have inspired me, grounding me and reminding me of what truly matters. I owe a debt of gratitude to all of them. Their influence and support have been the bedrock of my journey, shaping me into who I am today.

I will remain in debt to those I did not mention by name and who influenced my development journey.

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