

To: **The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)**

Submit per email: [foodinquiry@sahrc.org.za](mailto:foodinquiry@sahrc.org.za)

27 February 2026

**Re: SAFCEI's Submission to The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) National Investigative hearing into the Food Systems of South Africa**

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) recognises that the right to food is a human right, enabled through the ability to produce or to buy food. The right to food is inextricably linked to the right to life and dignity. Food should therefore be available, accessible and adequate to all without discrimination.

Food customs and practices are deeply embedded in communities as cultural and ritual practices and are linked to faith traditions and cultural identity. Faith communities uphold the wholeness, divinity and sanctity of food and life, remembering that the physical intake of food has a spiritual dimension. SAFCEI's Food and Climate Justice programme seeks to empower faith communities and those most affected to better understand and to actively advocate for agroecological systems that promote sustainable consumption, guarantees access to nourishing food to uphold human dignity, help address health pandemics and help to build climate resilience while upholding human dignity. We oppose destructive food-intensive systems like factory farming, industrial agriculture and GMOs and advocate for sustainable, equitable alternatives that are in harmony with nature.

**Theme 1: A Crisis of Historic Justice, Not Scarcity**

*The historic and present structural dynamics and economic factors that perpetuate hunger and systemic exclusions, despite national food sufficiency.*

South Africa's food system, shaped by colonial and apartheid-era policies and later by neo-liberal economic policies, fails to deliver the nutrition needed for its people living in South Africa. Government's endorsement and promotion of industrial-style agriculture is harmful to ecological and human health, and it reduces the ability of farming and eco-systems to maintain resilience or adapt to climate change.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI). 2023. Exploring an agroecological approach to agri-food systems in South Africa, [https://safcei.org/uploads/Online\\_SAFCEI\\_South-Africa-agroecology-reporr-\\_Final.pdf#:~:text=There is an urgent need for transformation,agroecology as a framework for agri-food systems.](https://safcei.org/uploads/Online_SAFCEI_South-Africa-agroecology-reporr-_Final.pdf#:~:text=There is an urgent need for transformation,agroecology as a framework for agri-food systems.)

The apartheid regime viewed food security through the lens of national self-sufficiency (subsidising white commercial farmers), while systematically engineering food poverty among black South Africans through forced removals and the "homeland" system.<sup>2</sup>

The transition to democracy sought to dismantle this legacy by making the right to food a justiciable reality for all citizens, regardless of race. Under Section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution, everyone has the right to access sufficient food, and Section 28(1)(c) guarantees children the right to basic nutrition.

By enshrining the Right to Food, the post-1996 government shifted the legal mandate from merely incentivising production to ensuring universal access. However, with one in four children still suffering from stunting—a figure that has barely moved in three decades—it is a systemic failure by government to meet the rights guaranteed by Section 28. The state's failure to realise the immediately enforceable right to basic nutrition under Section 28 constitutes a profound constitutional violation. Entrenched in an industrialised, corporate-led food system, the government continues the futile pursuit of "economic growth" to solve hunger. To uphold the Constitution and protect children's health, a moral and systemic shift toward agroecology is required to secure long-term food sovereignty.

"This is the year in which we will turn the tide of corruption in our public institutions,..."

"We are determined to build a society defined by decency and integrity, that does not tolerate the plunder of public resources, nor the theft by corporate criminals of the hard-earned savings of ordinary people."

President Cyril Ramaphosa pledges 'new dawn' for South Africa, February 2018<sup>3</sup>

State-Sanctioned Starvation: How Corruption and Unaccountability Erode South Africa's Right to Food

The Zondo Commission cost taxpayers approximately R1 billion, and four years later, while the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) is currently pursuing 218 criminal investigation recommendations from the Commission, successful convictions for high-profile state capture figures remain non-existent.<sup>4</sup>

One of the key findings in the Commission's report highlighted the socio-economic impact of corruption, indicating that the adverse effects of state capture on South Africa's economy and society are extensive. It provides the critical link between high-level financial crime and the daily reality of hunger in

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<sup>2</sup> Nkrumah, Bright. (2019). Opening Pandora's box: A legal analysis of the right to food in South Africa. *De Jure Law Journal*, 52(1), 47-64. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2225-7160/2019/v52a3>

<sup>3</sup> BBC, President Cyril Ramaphosa pledges 'new dawn' for South Africa, 17 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43093370>

<sup>4</sup> CDH, Understanding the social impact of corruption in South Africa, 24 Feb 2026, <https://www.cliffedekkerhofmeyr.com/en/news/publications/2026/South-Africa/Corporate-White-Collar-Investigations/Corporate-White-Collar-Investigations-and-dispute-resolution-alert-24-february-Understanding-the-social-impact-of-corruption-in-South-Africa#:~:text=In July 2025, the President,growth and prosperity for all.>

South Africa. The "looting of state funds" is not merely a white-collar crime, but a direct driver of perpetual inequality.<sup>5</sup>

Systemic unaccountability is the primary driver of nutritional food insecurity in South Africa. Fragmented government responses leave a vacuum where children's rights are ignored and "New Dawn" promises of reform are exposed as hollow. With R27 billion siphoned off by corruption every year, the state is effectively starving its own people. This stolen wealth is not just a statistic; it is the difference between life and death for the most vulnerable, as it could fund nutritional assistance for half of all hungry families or eliminate hunger for 50% of the country's children. Food insecurity in South Africa is not a natural disaster but a direct result of systemic government failure and the diversion of resources.

### **Suggestions:**

- Address the state's complicity in its failure to protect children's health and nutrition. Section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution now mandates that everyone has the right to access sufficient food and water. Unlike the exclusionary policies of the past, Section 27(2) obliges the state to take "reasonable legislative and other measures" to ensure the progressive realisation of this right. Legal scholars emphasise that this is an "immediate obligation" rather than one subject to progressive realisation, intended to prevent the lifelong effects of malnutrition, such as stunted development.

## **Theme 2 : Corporate Capture of the Food System**

*The concentration of power in the food value chain and its impact on access, affordability, and nutritional quality.*

SAFCEI identifies systemic failure in the food system as a fundamental disconnect between South Africa's abundant natural resources and the millions of citizens who remain hungry or malnourished. We argue that the current industrialised model is inherently flawed; it prioritises corporate profit, specialised livestock genetics and monocrop production over the constitutional right to food, dignity, and a healthy environment.

The concentration of power within South Africa's food system is a vertical hierarchy that begins with global supranational influence and international corporatisation, trickling down to a highly consolidated domestic landscape of production, processing, and distribution. While the dominance of "Big Food Retail" structures aid these corporations in leveraging massive economies of scale that move large volumes of product, this efficiency does not equate to nutritional food security. Instead, these centralised systems often prioritise

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<sup>5</sup> CDH, Understanding the social impact of corruption in South Africa, 24 Feb 2026, <https://www.cliffedekkerhofmeyr.com/en/news/publications/2026/South-Africa/Corporate-White-Collar-Investigations/Corporate-White-Collar-Investigations-and-dispute-resolution-alert-24-february-Understanding-the-social-impact-of-corruption-in-South-Africa#:~:text=In July 2025, the President,growth and prosperity for all.>

shelf-stable, ultra-processed goods over fresh, nutrient-dense alternatives, resulting in a market that delivers high-calorie volume, and profits, while failing to provide affordable, high-quality nutrition required to uphold constitutional mandates.

“Commoditisation is the process of converting products or services into standardised, marketable objects. This process tends to strip away unique or identifying qualities of the commodity in favour of identical, lower cost items that can be interchanged with one another.”

Gabriel Manyangadze, SAFCEI’s Food & Climate Justice Manager

### **Technological "Silver Bullets": How Global Crises Are Used to Entrench Corporate Dependency**

As environmental crises and global pandemics destabilise food security, panicked governments are increasingly drawn to "silver bullet" technological fixes promoted by agrifood giants. This shift was starkly visible at the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, where a partnership with the World Economic Forum allowed corporate interests to lead the agenda, sidelining more holistic, social-ecological approaches. The danger lies in a systemic "lock-in," where once global food infrastructure is built around these specific high-tech trajectories, which means pivoting to more sustainable or local models becomes nearly impossible. This pattern mirrors the historical transition from the Green Revolution to the "gene revolution," where the focus shifted from chemical intensification to genetic modification without ever questioning the underlying logic of industrial monocultures or recognising the resilience of existing gene diversity that occurs in natural systems. Instead of using crises brought on by disease to rethink the social and environmental damage caused by intensive farming, policymakers risk doubling down on proprietary technologies that reinforce corporate control and harmful practices, such as pesticide use. By framing technological innovations as the only viable response to climate change, the industry ensures that the future of food remains tethered to a narrow path of technological dependency rather than genuine structural reform.<sup>6</sup>

### **Corporate Control Preserved through False Solutions**

Corporate agribusinesses frequently engineer "false solutions"<sup>7</sup> to mitigate the very systemic crises their models have generated. Despite overwhelming evidence that the current industrial agricultural paradigm is unsustainable, these corporations deploy reformist rhetoric to preserve their operational viability while avoiding structural change. By critically identifying the underlying characteristics of these deceptive interventions, we can shift the prevailing narrative: these are not earnest but flawed attempts at resolution, but rather calculated strategic manoeuvres designed to insulate the corporate agribusiness model from genuine

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<sup>6</sup> Mooney, P., Jacobs, N., Villa, V., Thomas, J., Bacon, M.-H., Vandelac, L., & Schiavoni, C. (2021, March 30). A long food movement: Transforming food systems by 2045. IPES-Food & ETC Group. [www.ipes-food.org](http://www.ipes-food.org).

<sup>7</sup> False solutions, real profits: agribusiness' tactics uncovered, 30 Mar, 2024, found at <https://www.foei.org/103-publication/agribusiness-false-solutions-real-profit/>

transformation. False solutions are a pillar of the corporate agribusiness model. Agribusinesses are active members of the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative, which champions "regenerative agriculture" and places itself at the centre of sustainable value chains. As an example, Syngenta is active in discussions on regenerative agriculture at climate summits and champions its (pesticide fuelled) version of food security. Syngenta exemplifies the corporate strategy of internalizing reformist language to preserve a destructive status quo. While the company actively participates in high-level climate summits to champion its version of "regenerative agriculture," organizations such as the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and Biowatch South Africa have accused the corporation of perpetuating a pesticide-fuelled model that undermines genuine food sovereignty. This "false solution" frames chemical-intensive farming as a tool for food security, yet in practice, it maintains farmer dependency on proprietary inputs and harmful agrochemicals. By re-branding industrial agriculture as "regenerative," Syngenta effectively shifts the narrative to ensure that the transition to sustainable systems remains under corporate control, ultimately threatening the long-term realisation of the constitutional right to food by degrading the ecological foundations—soil health and biodiversity—upon which future food security depends.

### **Progress or Predation? The Perils of Unchecked Digitalisation in South Africa's Agricultural Transition**

South Africa's push toward the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions (4IR/5IR) in agriculture is anchored in a suite of policies such as the *Digital Agriculture Strategy (DAS) and Implementation Plan 2024 – 2030*, designed to transition the sector from traditional methods to a high-tech "industrial ecosystem." These frameworks align with the African Union's Agenda 2063 by prioritising digitisation, precision farming, and global competitiveness.

The South African poultry and pork sectors are being fundamentally reshaped by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), manifesting in an "industrialisation of freshness" that merges digital, physical, and biological technologies into highly automated production environments. This technocratic transition leverages sophisticated tools—including IoT-enabled sensors for real-time moisture and temperature monitoring, and AI-driven systems for automated feeding and health tracking—to achieve unprecedented gains in productivity and biosecurity. However, this rapid digitalisation is heavily dependent on significant economies of scale, creating a steep "generational" and economic divide that further marginalises small-scale and emerging farmers who cannot afford the prohibitive capital costs, data expenses, or specialized digital infrastructure required to compete. Furthermore, while these "smart" systems enhance operational efficiency, they introduce complex dimensions to animal welfare; automation can decrease manual labor while optimising resource use; it risks reducing livestock to data points within a corporate-controlled, algorithm-driven model that

prioritizes throughput and export-market compliance over the holistic needs of the animals and the inclusion of smaller producers.<sup>8</sup> (*Discussed further under Concentration of Power in South Africa's Poultry Sector*).

### **Supranational and Philanthrocapital Influence on Agricultural Policy**

The concentration of power among global agribusiness giants remains a century-old crisis that has consistently outpaced regulatory oversight. Despite historical attempts to curb this dominance through anti-trust policies, lobbying registers, and even a proposed United Nations Code of Conduct on Transnational Corporations, these efforts have proven largely inadequate as corporate influence over the global food agenda continues to expand.<sup>9</sup>

High levels of supranational and "philanthro-capital" power influence policy and legislation in corporate control of poultry genetics worldwide. A coalition of advocacy groups, including SAFCEI, GRAIN, and the SKI, revealed how concentrated supranational and "philanthro-capital" power systematically reshapes African agricultural policy to favour corporate interests. By leveraging developmental aid, these influential entities steer national and regional legislation toward a centralised, technocratic model that prioritizes profit-driven market creation over local autonomy. This strategic intervention replaces traditional poultry systems with high-input, hybrid breeds, ensuring that the global broiler and layer markets remain firmly under corporate control while marginalising indigenous farming practices.<sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> (*Discussed further under Indigenous Knowledge and Agroecology*)

Three corporations, specifically Tyson (USA), EWS (Germany), and Hendrix (Netherlands), control 90% of global poultry genetics, dominating both the broiler and layer markets. This concentration allows these firms to dictate production through the continuous supply of parental lines and restrictive contracts with African licensees, enabling high margins and price-fixing. Furthermore, this market dominance fosters collusion with feed and vaccine manufacturers.<sup>12</sup>

High levels of corporate concentration and power in agrifood supply chains raise important policy concerns because they can affect food systems in adverse ways. Increased corporate concentration in food systems diminishes individual and community agency—the ability to make choices and have a voice—through three primary mechanisms<sup>13</sup>:

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<sup>8</sup> Habiyaremye, A., Ncube, P., Sichoongwe, K., & Slater, A. (2024). The use of advanced technology in South African agriculture: Insights from selected sub-sectors (Working Paper No. 2024-07). SARCHI Industrial Development, University of Johannesburg. <https://www.uj.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/wp2024-07-habiyaremye-ncube-sichoongwe-slater.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> IPES-Food, 2023. Who's Tipping the Scales? The growing influence of corporations on the governance of food systems, and how to 102 counter it, found at [https://www.ipes-food.org/\\_img/upload/files/tippingthescales.pdf](https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/tippingthescales.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> SAFCEI-GRAIN-CAGJ-ASFA-SKI webinar, GRAIN's findings on the corporate takeover of poultry in Africa, 24 Nov 2025

<sup>11</sup> GRAIN. (2025, October 20). Who rules the roost? Corporate vs community poultry in Africa. <https://grain.org/en/article/7317-who-rules-the-roost-corporate-vs-community-poultry-in-africa>.

<sup>12</sup> SAFCEI-GRAIN-CAGJ-ASFA-SKI webinar, GRAIN's findings on the corporate takeover of poultry in Africa, 24 Nov 2025

<sup>13</sup> Clapp, J., Vriezen, R., Laila, A., Conti, C., Gordon, L., Hicks, C., & Rao, N. (2025). Corporate concentration and power matter for agency in food systems. *Food Policy*, 134, 102897. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2025.102897>

- **Market Power:** Large firms exploit their dominance to generate excessive profits by raising prices for consumers while lowering wages and opportunities for workers.
- **Material Influence:** These companies dictate the physical realities of the food system, including production technologies, working conditions, and the level of processing in foods, which restricts the options available to the public.
- **Political Power:** Corporations use lobbying and indirect influence to shape food policies, effectively sidelining democratic participation and public interest in governance.<sup>14</sup>

African countries with established competition institutions often lack the necessary resources, data, and political support to effectively counter anti-competitive practices within the agri-food sector. Despite having the legal authority to review mergers, these regulators have historically blocked very few consolidations, failing to prevent significant market concentration.<sup>15</sup>

In South Africa, the Competition Commission acts as a guardian of market structure. Initiating formal, large-scale investigations into the general state of competition within a specific sector, such as the poultry sector (meat and eggs) is the most concentrated livestock segment, currently under a formal *Poultry Market Inquiry* by the Competition Commission as of September 30, 2025.

The commoditisation of our food system also purposefully ignores the true cost of accounting of the fallouts of this system. While the expansion of intensive livestock systems has increased food availability, the true cost accounting of these operations—which reveals the hidden environmental and social costs including poor animal welfare—remains largely unexplored and ignored.

The rising density of poultry production increases the risks of disease (e.g. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza /HPAI), which, while improved detection and treatment make them more easily contained, also raises costs for the industry which impacts consumer price. Poultry production also faces environmental and health challenges, particularly regarding antibiotic use and animal welfare concerns.<sup>16 17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Clapp, J., Vriezen, R., Laila, A., Conti, C., Gordon, L., Hicks, C., & Rao, N. (2025). Corporate concentration and power matter for agency in food systems. *Food Policy*, 134, 102897. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2025.102897>

<sup>15</sup> Buthelezi, T., Hammadi, M., Roberts, S., & Smaller, C. (2023). Empowering African food producers and agricultural enterprises through stronger competition law and policy. Shamba Centre for Food & Climate. [shambacentre.org](http://shambacentre.org)

<sup>16</sup> OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2024-2033, found at [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/07/oecd-fao-agricultural-outlook-2024-2033\\_e173f332/4c5d2cfb-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/07/oecd-fao-agricultural-outlook-2024-2033_e173f332/4c5d2cfb-en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> UK AID, Poultry Sector Study March 2019, Expert Advisory Call Down Service, Lot C , found at [https://beamexchange.org/uploads/filer\\_public/69/82/698222cb-c7f8-45e3-a3b8-0e6cde5afc9c/dfid\\_poultry\\_sector\\_study\\_-\\_final\\_report\\_180419\\_public\\_compressed.pdf](https://beamexchange.org/uploads/filer_public/69/82/698222cb-c7f8-45e3-a3b8-0e6cde5afc9c/dfid_poultry_sector_study_-_final_report_180419_public_compressed.pdf)

## **Concentration of Power in South Africa's Poultry Sector**

According to SAPA "The domestic poultry industry is a R65-billion strategic national asset – the second largest agricultural sector, while being the largest employer, employing almost 58,000 South Africans across the value chain."<sup>18</sup> This makes the poultry sector one of the largest agricultural employers. However, the rapid adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies, such as AI, IoT sensors, and robotics, is making several traditional manual tasks and roles obsolete while creating a demand for new, higher-level technical skills.<sup>19</sup>

South Africa's poultry industry is defined by high vertical integration and market concentration, where a few dominant firms control multiple stages of the value chain. Global genetics are restricted to a handful of local distributors, with major players like Astral, RCL Foods, and Country Bird Holdings managing the primary broiler breeds, while Quantum Foods, Hy-Line, and Serfontein dominate egg-laying stock. This control extends into the feed sector, where three integrated companies produce 75% of all poultry feed, leaving independent mills with a minimal market share. Within the broiler market specifically, Astral and RCL Foods command nearly half of the local supply, while the egg sector is similarly consolidated under Quantum Foods, Sovereign Foods and Kuipers) supplying 51% of the market. Most eggs, 75%, end up in the formal sector through major retailers and the hospitality sector.

## **The Power of the Retailer**

"The empirical evidence tells us that the gap between the farm-gate price and retailer price of food has widened extensively over the past 25 years. What we see is that farmers have a smaller and smaller share of the retail price of food. The terms of trade for farmers have definitely declined, a lot of farmers, especially small-scale farmers going out of business but at the same time we see that retailers are making a good profit out of the food sector. We see that consumers are also losers in the food system. 80% of consumers cannot afford to buy a nutritionally balanced basket of food. Who controls what? The political economy of our food system."<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Tracy Ledger, Senior Research at the Public Affairs Research Institute. 31 JULY 2020.

Through years of poultry hen layer welfare advocacy in the South African poultry sector, SAFCEI has prioritised engagement with major retailers like \*Woolworths, SPAR, Pick n Pay, and Food Lover's Market as key drivers of systemic change. Recognising that these corporations hold significant influence over the entire

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<sup>18</sup> South African Poultry Association (SAPA), STATE OF THE SA POULTRY INDUSTRY, Media Statement, found at <https://www.sapoultry.co.za/state-of-the-sa-poultry-industry/>

<sup>19</sup> Habiyaemye, A., Ncube, P., Sichoongwe, K., & Slater, A. (2024). The use of advanced technology in South African agriculture: Insights from selected sub-sectors (Working Paper No. 2024-07). SARChI Industrial Development, University of Johannesburg. <https://www.uj.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/wp2024-07-habiyaemye-ncube-sichoongwe-slater.pdf>

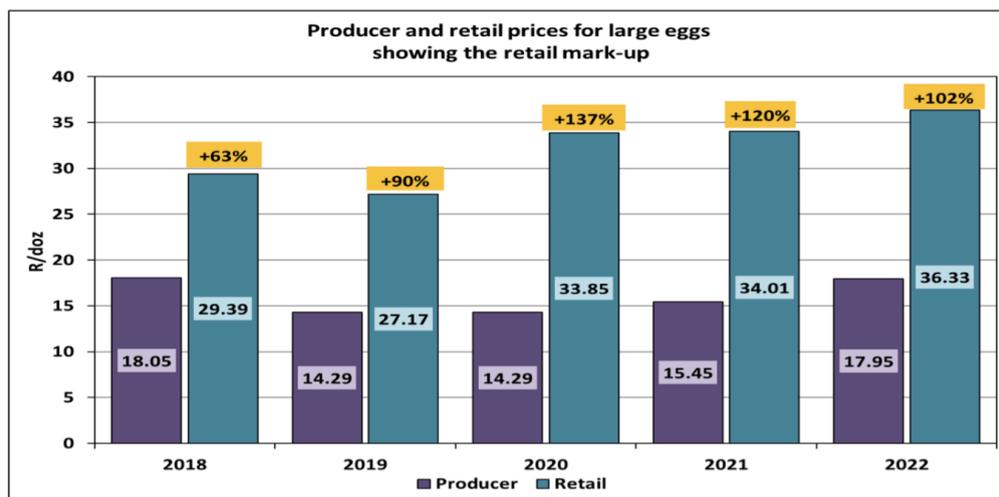
<sup>20</sup> Dr. Tracy Ledger, Senior Research at the Public Affairs Research Institute. 31 JULY 2020. <https://capetown.fooddialogues.in-fo/talks/who-controls-what-the-political-economy-of-our-food-system/?ah=5DyZdRym#>

value chain, SAFCEI has intentionally engaged them to demand a formal end to their support for caged egg production.

By focusing on these retail giants, SAFCEI aimed to leverage combined market power to shift the industry toward more ethical animal welfare procurement by adopting cage-free policies, effectively encouraging a transition across the broader poultry value chain.

This drive for systemic change recently met a significant barrier when the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA) wrote to SAFCEI about its pursuit of these reforms with CGCSA members, even suggesting potential legal action to stifle campaigns for more ethical and resilient food systems (*please see Theme 4 : The Indivisibility of Rights, for more on this*).

\*Note: Woolworths were part of discussions, mostly as an observer since they have already made a public commitment to not procure caged eggs within their value chain.



**2017:**  
**60%** retail mark-up  
**11.5%** producer price increase



Above is a visual representation of the notable concern of the considerable gap between what producers and retailers receive for a dozen eggs. The retail

mark-up on producer prices soared from 62.8% in 2018 to 120% in 2021. The substantial 18.8% increase in feed prices throughout the year put immense pressure on profit margins. Farm gate egg prices, in contrast, only increased by 8.1% despite the escalating feed costs.<sup>21</sup> This has created an ever-narrowing profit margin for producers who carry all the risks of production.<sup>22</sup> Small-scale farmers need fair pricing due to lack of volume. Producers are price takers and not price makers. The Farm-to-Retail-Price-Spread (FTRPS) favour large producers. Scale/volume of producers means they can absorb lower retail prices which they make up for in volume of sales—small-scale farmers need fair pricing due to lack of volume.

Small-scale egg producers continue to face significant barriers to entering the formal retail market, a challenge that has become a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion. Because these farmers have historically been denied access, they are often unable to achieve the necessary scale of expansion required to meet the high-volume supply contracts demanded by national retailers.

### **The Hidden Costs of Secrecy—Institutional Opacity in the Poultry Sector**

The poultry industry remains shrouded in a lack of transparency that directly undermines the public's right to hold the state accountable. The National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC)—a statutory body—produced a cost-transition study for the South African Poultry Association (SAPA) whose data that remains hidden from public scrutiny. (*please see Theme 4 : The Indivisibility of Rights, for more on this*). Signed off by the Minister of Agriculture, the NAMC report claims that transitioning the nation to cage-free systems would require a massive R4.93 billion investment, with a capital expenditure of up to R461 per hen. The study further suggests that passing these costs to consumers would result in a price hike of between R5,70 and R6.00 per dozen eggs over five years.<sup>23</sup> SAFCEI does not agree with passing on the transition cost to the consumer and cites the lack of transparency of the data making it impossible to either confirm or refute these claims.

According to the SAPA, a staggering 95% of layer hens are confined to caged systems, with free-range and barn systems accounting for a mere 4% and 1% respectively. This indicates that for the ethical and informed consumer, the demand for higher animal welfare is not adequately being met by industry. *SAPA's Code* permits the continued use of Battery Cages until at least 1 January 2039, even though civil society, including consumers, have been requesting the transition to cage-free production for more than two decades. SAPA and industry have worked against transitioning for decades. This is starkly apparent in the unchanging dominance of the caged battery system. Extensive research

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<sup>21</sup> Poultry Industry Profile for the South African Poultry Association. Egg industry in South Africa Overview. SA Poultry, found at [https://farmingsouthafrica.co.za/chicken-farming-stats-and-overview-south-africa/#Egg\\_industry\\_in\\_South\\_Africa](https://farmingsouthafrica.co.za/chicken-farming-stats-and-overview-south-africa/#Egg_industry_in_South_Africa)

<sup>22</sup> SAPA, Viability of Cage-Free – the Case of the South African Egg Layer System. Presented by: Dr Abongile Balarane 2023/06/07: <https://www.sapoultry.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/7-Dr-Abongile-Balarane->

<sup>23</sup> Viability of Cage-Free – the Case of the South African Egg Layer System. Presented by: Dr Abongile Balarane, 2023/06/07

suggests that the economic and consumer demand barriers to transitioning to cage-free egg production are often overestimated, and that there is a strong ethical and growing consumer mandate for improved animal welfare.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, there are various mitigation proposals available for any disproportionate impact on lower-income households and policy recommendations that could include government subsidies for producers and targeted assistance for low-income consumers (e.g. vouchers).

### **Suggestion Actions:**

- Strong regulatory action is needed to reorient subsidies and fiscal packages away from the corporate sector in favour of small producers, and to prosecute corporate collusion and break up corporate oligopolies in the poultry sector.<sup>25</sup>
- South African communities should set the agenda to achieve their own visions of food sovereignty and agroecology.
- While we respect the right of retailers to strategise, maximise profit, and manage their procurement contracts within the bounds of competition law, we cannot ignore the immense power these corporations hold to dictate the trajectory of the entire poultry value chain. To address this imbalance, we advocate for fairer farm-gate prices that reflect the true value of small-scale production. Furthermore, we call on the dominant grocery retailers—including Pick n Pay, Shoprite-Checkers, SPAR, Woolworths, and Food Lover's Market—to leverage their influence by sourcing a greater volume and variety of cage-free and free-range products, ensuring these higher welfare choices are accessible to consumers at affordable prices.

### **Theme 3 : The Centrality of Land and Agrarian Reform**

*The link between land access, tenure security, and food insecurity, especially for women, smallholder, and communal farmers.*

Land on its own is not sufficient for successful farming. Smallholder farmers need support in gaining access to infrastructure and markets, as well as capital (Mani et al., 2021). Beyond these challenges, the basis of production in South Africa – water, soil and biodiversity – is increasingly degraded.<sup>26</sup>

By failing to prioritise soil health and communal land access, the state treats land as a commodity rather than the biological foundation of the Right to Food. To end the stunting and nutritional food insecurity crisis, land reform must be decoupled from the industrial growth mandate and reconnected to local,

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<sup>24</sup> Oliveira, L. S. N., Garcia, R. G., Burbarelli, M. F. C., Dutra, F. M., Binotto, E., Noriller, R. M., Basaia, D. C. K., Machado, M. V., Komiyama, C. M., & Caldara, F. R. (2022). Economic feasibility in commercial egg production in a conventional and cage-free systems with different stocking densities. *Brazilian Journal of Poultry Science*, 24(4), e20221636. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-9061-2022-1636>

<sup>25</sup> GRAIN. (2025, October 20). Who rules the roost? Corporate vs community poultry in Africa. <https://grain.org/en/article/7317-who-rules-the-roost-corporate-vs-community-poultry-in-africa>.

<sup>26</sup> South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI). 2023. Exploring an agroecological approach to agri-food systems in South Africa, [https://safcei.org/uploads/Online\\_SAFCEI\\_South-Africa-agroecology-reporr-\\_Final.pdf#:~:text=There is an urgent need for transformation,agroecology as a framework for agri-food systems.](https://safcei.org/uploads/Online_SAFCEI_South-Africa-agroecology-reporr-_Final.pdf#:~:text=There is an urgent need for transformation,agroecology as a framework for agri-food systems.)

nutrient-dense production. The debate over land reform should be shifting from a focus on "hectares transferred" to the quality of nutrition those hectares can sustain. Centering land as the foundation for Section 28 rights requires moving away from the "upscale to commercialise" model toward a sovereignty-based approach rooted in soil and community health.

Access to land is not the only determinant of success. Farmers need access to capital, infrastructure, labour and training. More financial support must be found to enable those already training or advocating for agroecology on the ground to share their knowledge with others.<sup>27</sup>

Current government policy often views land reform as a ladder toward large-scale commercialism. However, for smallholder and communal farmers—who produce the bulk of local nutrition—the goal is often household and community resilience.<sup>28</sup>

### **Suggestion Action:**

Professor Ben Cousins and other researchers at PLAAS specifically argue that the "commercial success" metric used by the government is too narrow. They advocate for a "livelihoods-based" approach that recognises:

- Small-scale producers who provide food for their families and local markets.
- The role of land in providing a social safety net (Section 28 support).
- The need for informal market support rather than just formal retail supply chains.

### **Theme 4 : The Indivisibility of Rights**

*The intersection between the right to food and related constitutional rights, i.e: dignity, health, water, and environment.*

SAFCEI's mission is built on the foundational belief in the inherent value of all beings. This commitment is deeply rooted in diverse faith traditions that emphasize compassion, custodianship and the profound interconnectedness and sacredness of all life. Modern science reinforces this spiritual understanding, demonstrating that humans are inseparable from a larger ecological web and that the health of the natural world—including the animals within it—is a direct determinant of human well-being.

Within the agricultural sector, SAFCEI asserts a clear ethical and moral imperative to protect animals and promote humane treatment. These values are

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<sup>27</sup> South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI). 2023. Exploring an agroecological approach to agri-food systems in South Africa, [https://safcei.org/uploads/Online\\_SAFCEI\\_South-Africa-agroecology-reporr-\\_Final.pdf#:~:text=There is an urgent need for transformation,agroecology as a framework for agri-food systems.](https://safcei.org/uploads/Online_SAFCEI_South-Africa-agroecology-reporr-_Final.pdf#:~:text=There is an urgent need for transformation,agroecology as a framework for agri-food systems.)

<sup>28</sup> Cousins, B. (2016). Land reform in South Africa is failing. Can it be saved? Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa 92, 135-157. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/trn.2016.0030>.

not mere sentiments; they are protected by a robust framework of constitutional rights. The right to food intersects with other critical constitutional protections. In a democratic South Africa, the pursuit of a more compassionate food system should be met with state support and corporate cooperation, rather than the patterns of industry bullying and legal intimidation currently used to suppress advocacy. To violate these rights is to ignore both the scientific reality of our shared environment and the moral conscience of the faith communities we represent.

“Access to information is the oxygen of democracy.”  
Justice Ngcobo, 2012

Justice Ngcobo also said that secrecy provided a ‘fertile ground for corruption’ and that, in terms of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, disclosure of information should be the rule and non-disclosure the exception.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Hidden Costs of Secrecy—Institutional Opacity in the Poultry Sector (*continued from Theme 2*)**

Funded by a public levy, the 2022 National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) study on transitioning to cage-free eggs was withheld from the public by the South African Poultry Association (SAPA) and the NAMC, creating an information vacuum and violating PAIA standards. This secrecy prevents scrutiny of the findings and hampers civil society's ability to participate in policy-making, representing a failure of government accountability.

### **Contradictions to Section 32 and Transparency Laws (PAIA)**

- Violation of the Right of Access (Section 32): The constitutionally guaranteed right to information held by the state or private bodies is denied, hindering the exercise of rights related to food pricing and welfare.
- Abuse of Commercial Confidentiality: Publicly funded research is being shielded under commercial confidentiality, contradicting the presumption of disclosure for information funded by statutory levies.
- Obstruction of Scrutiny: Industry quotes from the study while withholding data and methodologies prevents essential peer review and public scrutiny of the study's conclusions.
- Erosion of Participation: The lack of transparency prevents meaningful public consultation, as civil society cannot access the same data used to inform the poultry industry and other stakeholders and possibly policy.
- Failure of Statutory Accountability: The NAMC has failed in its duty to remain open, allowing a private entity (SAPA) to control the release of a state-sanctioned report.

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<sup>29</sup> Manyathi, N. (2012, April 1). Access to information is the oxygen of democracy – Justice Ngcobo. De Rebus. <https://www.derebus.org.za/access-information-oxygen-democracy-justice-ngcobo/>

- Neglect of Public Interest Concerns: The refusal disregards the public's right to access information, particularly regarding environmental and safety factors associated with the egg industry.

### **The Consumer's Right to Informed Choice**

While consumer demand is a critical lever for shifting production practices, the egg labelling regulations<sup>30</sup> under the Agricultural Product Standards Act (APSA) currently facilitates a "permissive" rather than mandatory labelling environment. The logic behind legislating labelling acts becomes contradictory when the use of permissive language like "may" effectively renders enforcement optional. The significant public expenditure required to draft, consult on, and pass these acts implies a state mandate to protect the public; however, by offering these "grey areas," the government undermines its own duty of care to safeguard consumer rights. Such flexible wording allows industry players to bypass transparency, suggesting that the legislative process has been reduced to a bureaucratic exercise rather than a functional tool for accountability. If the state is to truly uphold Section 24 of the Consumer Protection Act and the constitutional right to information, it must close these loopholes, ensuring that the cost of legislation results in mandatory protections rather than elective disclosures.

- The Updated Regulations: Under APSA, regulations for the grading, packing, and marking of eggs were updated in 2020 to include definitions for "cage," "barn," and "free-range" production:

The regulations contain conditions for labelling caged eggs:

*Eggs shall only be marked with the expression "cage eggs" if such eggs are produced by poultry that are kept in cages throughout their laying period: Provided that -- (a) cages shall be within a shed and may include a nest box, perch and a dust bath; and (b) birds shall have adequate space to feed and lay.<sup>31</sup>*

- Regulation 8(1)(b): This specific regulation states that production methods "may" precede or follow the word "eggs" on packaging. The use of "may" renders the disclosure of the production method voluntary.

Reg 8(1)(b) states:

*The expression "eggs" shall be indicated on the front or top panel: Provided that the following information may precede or follow the expression "eggs" in letters of the same size, font and colour: ... The specific production methods, namely "cage", "barn" or "free range": Provided further that the production method indicated shall at least comply with the applicable definition in regulation 1. ..."*

<sup>30</sup> Regulations Regarding the Grading, Packing and Marking of Eggs Intended For Sale in the Republic of South Africa. Government Gazette GNR. 345

<sup>31</sup> Reg 8(4)

- The Incentive Gap: Because the requirement is not mandatory, producers have no incentive to label products as "cage eggs," as doing so would only highlight poor welfare standards. Minimum care standards defined in Regulation 1 only apply if a producer chooses to use one of the three regulated terms.
- Section 6 of APSA contains a prohibition on the false or misleading description for products. It states:

*No person shall use any name, word, expression, reference, particulars or indication in any manner, either by itself or in conjunction with any other verbal, written, printed, illustrated or visual material, in connection with the sale of a product in a manner that conveys or creates or is likely to convey or create a false or misleading impression as to the nature, substance, quality or other properties, or the class or grade, origin, identity, or manner or place of production, of that product.*

### **Suggested Actions:**

- If a challenge were brought before the National Consumer Tribunal (NCT) under Section 69 of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA)<sup>32</sup>, the Act would serve as a powerful tool to assert the fundamental right of consumers to full disclosure and transparent information.

The legal weight of this argument rests on two critical pillars:

- Section 24(2): This provision explicitly prohibits retailers from "knowingly applying" any trade description to goods that is likely to mislead a consumer regarding any matter, whether expressed or implied.
- Section 24(3): This section extends the liability further, prohibiting retailers from offering, displaying, or supplying goods if they know—or "reasonably could determine" or have "reason to suspect"—that the trade description is likely to mislead the consumer.

In the context of the egg industry, failing to disclose "caged" production methods while using ambiguous or "permissive" labelling could be argued as a breach of these sections, as it effectively withholds the "manner of production" necessary for an informed purchase.

### **Silencing the Messenger—How Corporate "Legal Threats" Violate Sections 16, 17, and 24**

SAFCEI engaged major retailers as part of the Cage-Free Egg Campaign because their immense procurement power can incrementally shift the poultry sector toward cage-free production. However, on 11 March 2024, the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA)—via a legal executive—issued a threatening letter to Safcei's campaign manager, Zwelisha Shobede. The CGCSA claimed that Safcei's push for a 10% annual reduction in caged-egg procurement could foster "uncompetitive behaviour" and contravene the Competition Act, warning of legal

<sup>32</sup> 68 of 2008

action or a Competition Commission complaint. Safcei's legal counsel, Cormac Cullinan, dismissed these claims as baseless in a June 2024 response, noting that nothing in the Act prohibits firms from evolving supply methods based on welfare or sustainability. Furthermore, the CGCSA's apparent invocation of Section 8(1)(d) regarding "exclusionary acts" is legally irrelevant to a civil society campaign.

The CGCSA's attempt to stifle advocacy through intimidation contradicts several constitutional and statutory protections:

- Freedom of Expression (Section 16): Safeguards the right to impart information and voice animal welfare concerns.
- Assembly and Protest (Section 17): Guarantees the right to demonstrate and present petitions to hold corporate bodies accountable.
- Environmental Rights (Section 24): The Constitutional Court has explicitly linked animal welfare to the protection of the environment for future generations.
- The Consumer Protection Act (CPA): By obstructing SAFCEI, the CGCSA undermines Section 3, which promotes consumer rights, and Section 41, which prohibits "unconscionable conduct" and the use of physical force, coercion, or undue influence in commercial dealings.
- The Companies Act (Section 72): Large retailers have a "Social and Ethics Committee" mandate to monitor their impact on the environment and public interest; the CGCSA's threats arguably discourage these boards from fulfilling their statutory duties.
- The Competition Act (Section 8): Contrary to the CGCSA's claims, using industry-wide "working groups" to stall welfare progress could itself constitute a "Restrictive Horizontal Practice" (Section 4), as it forces a uniformity of products that denies consumers choice and shields dominant firms from competitive pressure to innovate.

"The right of academics to criticise university administrations has been particularly contentious. Taken together, these concerns suggest that the values entrenched in the constitution and in education practice are being eroded by government policy, funding agencies, sponsors and donors, and by institutional management."

(Academy of Science of South Africa 2010)<sup>33</sup>

### **Influence on Research and South African agricultural Policy by Funders**

The South African Constitution enshrines the right to academic freedom. Section 16(1)d of the Constitution states, in the Bill of Rights, that: "16. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes—d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research" (Republic of South Africa 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Operations Coordinator, T. (2010). Academic Freedom statement from the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). South African Journal of Science, 106(3/4), 1 page. <https://sajs.co.za/article/view/10172>

As state subsidies fluctuate, universities increasingly rely on philanthropic capital, which reached approximately R1.8 billion in 2022. When Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) income was added to this philanthropic income, funding rose to R2,2 billion in the 2022 academic year.<sup>34</sup> Critics argue that while academic freedom is constitutionally protected, there are few robust national mechanisms to enforce these protections against subtle donor pressures or “incentive-based”.<sup>35</sup>

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) funds universities in South Africa for particular focus on agriculture and agricultural policy. The multi-million dollar grant (initiated in 2012) to the University of Pretoria was specifically designed to train PhD students to provide the data and analysis necessary for improved agricultural policy-making across Africa. The grant supported 18 PhD graduates, whose research focused on critical South African and regional issues such as agribusiness value chains, crop revenue insurance, and biological innovation. While the primary eight-year grant ended in 2019, the University continues to receive targeted funding, such as a \$550,287 grant in 2021 to establish a platform for evidence-based climate policy recommendations.<sup>36</sup> When multinational funders own the resulting datasets, there is a risk that information regarding South Africa’s agricultural, health, or social sectors could be used for private profit or external policy influence without local control.

In South Africa and across the African continent, agricultural research is increasingly shifting towards university-industry collaborations due to declining public funding and a growing emphasis on commercialisation. This focus is driven by the need for “third stream” funding and the pursuit of “impact literacy,” where research is tailored to meet the immediate operational requirements of the agribusiness sector.<sup>37</sup>

### **Suggested Actions:**

- The failure to label cage-produced eggs accurately could be challenged legally under consumer protection laws and APSA, presenting an opportunity to advocate for mandatory labelling.
- Restore the trust in the PAIA process. Interrogate the PAIA process being undermined by the South African Poultry Association hiding behind safeguarding intellectual property and refusing to make the NAMC study public which is a violation of the Right of Access.

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<sup>34</sup> 10th Annual Survey of Philanthropy in Higher Education (ASPIHE) report, Inyathelo, The South African Institute for Advancement.

<sup>35</sup> Muller, S. (2024). Academic freedom in the “incentivised university”: The case of South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 38(4), 1–11. [doi.org](https://doi.org/10.1080/16085914.2024.2311111)

<sup>36</sup> University of Pretoria, Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, Celebrating 8 years of research excellence November 25, 2019 <https://www.up.ac.za/agricultural-economics-extension-and-rural-development/news/celebrating-8-years-of-research-excellence>

<https://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/committed-grants/2021/12/inv035194#:~:text=Grantee website Pretoria, Gauteng, South,based actionable climate policy recommendations>

<sup>37</sup> Kigotho, W. (2024, June 13). University-industry agri-linkages ‘developing’ and diverse. *University World News*. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20240529085918781>

- Monitor rights violations and investigate if funding models systematically exclude certain research or infringe on constitutional freedoms.
- Establish if sensitive research is shared with direct-donors such as through the "Full Cost Exception". Who owns that data and is it being commodified in any way? What safeguards are in place and are they being adhered to that will address the tension between academic funding needs and national interest.<sup>38</sup>

## **Theme 5 : Indigenous Knowledge and Agroecology**

"Nature is us and we are nature; land, seed and the food it produces give us what we need to stay alive and healthy; in turn, we need to keep it pure and the spirit in it alive to continue the relationship of reciprocity."

– Abraham Mnguni, African Traditional Faith Leader, South Africa

In a time of industrial farming, integrating agroecological food systems into national, regional and global policy frameworks is no longer optional— it is a moral, ecological and food security imperative.

Integrating agroecological food systems into policy frameworks is critical for food security, utilising nature-based, local knowledge to enhance biodiversity. Indigenous systems in Southern Africa promote climate resilience and sovereignty through drought-tolerant crops, indigenous breeds and communal practices, with faith communities providing essential advocacy against industrial threats. Reinforcing these systems supports sustainable livelihoods, cultural continuity, and improved nutrition, offering a pathway toward climate justice. Read the full SAFCEI report *Faith, food and the future: Indigenous food systems for climate and community resilience.*<sup>39</sup>

GRAIN's report, "*Who rules the roost? Corporate vs community poultry in Africa,*" highlights how agroindustrial expansion and "philanthrocapitalist arrogance" such as the Gates Foundation, threaten traditional poultry systems and indigenous breeds genetics.

Indigenous chicken breeds, central to food sovereignty, are being defended for their resilience, suitability for local needs, and as a resistance to corporate control.

- African communities have a wealth of local chicken biodiversity: 85% of all chickens in Africa = "indigenous"
- But corporates are coming in and replacing those breeds with exotic hybrids (which, confusingly, are marketed as "local", "traditional", "kienyenji")

<sup>38</sup> Universities of South Africa, Intellectual Property creators at universities get to share in the benefits. Published: 17 March 2022, [https://usaf.ac.za/intellectual-property-creators-at-universities-get-to-share-in-the-benefits/#:~:text="We are working closely with,has totalled R270-million."](https://usaf.ac.za/intellectual-property-creators-at-universities-get-to-share-in-the-benefits/#:~:text=)

<sup>39</sup> SAFCEI. 2025. Faith, food and the future: Indigenous food systems for climate and community resilience. Cape Town: Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute.

- Demand for chicken meat & eggs is rising (#1 source of animal protein), so there is a huge market for corporates to capture in Africa<sup>40</sup>

Indigenous chicken breeds are known to be economically, socially, and culturally important to the people of Africa, especially those from marginalised communities. Several local chickens have been classified into breeds or ecotypes, but many remain unidentified and are facing extinction. To prevent this, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched an indigenous poultry conservation programme. In addition, the Agricultural Research Council in South Africa has established a programme to “protect” four local chicken breeds. Local chickens play a significant role in improving livelihoods, and strategies to preserve and sustain them must be intensified but the ARC research should come with a caution of its focus on commercial “improvement” over traditional autonomy.

### **Suggested Actions:**

- Legal reforms to protect farmer-managed seed systems, livestock genetics and communal land rights.
- Investment in agroecology, seed banks, local markets and processing infrastructure.
- Recognition of women’s leadership in food and seed systems.
- An acknowledgement of the contribution towards ecological stewardship made by indigenous knowledge systems in the region and the vital relationships between indigenous landscapes, foods, culture and spirituality.
- Integration of indigenous food systems into climate adaptation, biodiversity and nutrition policies.
- Regional cooperation for seed exchange, research and advocacy.
- Allocate public funding for agroecology training, extension services, research and infrastructure, including processing technologies and storage.
- Strengthen local markets through dedicated trading spaces, price support mechanisms and links to institutional buyers such as schools, hospitals and prisons (Shelembe et al. 2025).
- Develop structured training programmes on indigenous crop cultivation, intercropping and agroecological techniques (Shelembe et al. 2025).
- Establish demonstration farms to showcase successful indigenous farming systems (Shelembe et al. 2025).

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<sup>40</sup> SAFCEI-GRAIN-CAGJ-ASFA-SKI webinar, GRAIN’s findings on the corporate takeover of poultry in Africa, 24 Nov 2025

## **Theme 6 : Systemic Failure and Fragmented Governance**

*Institutional coordination, policy coherence, and legislative adequacy in realising the right to food.*

When food is treated primarily as a commodity, the "success" of the system is measured by corporate profit and export volumes rather than the nutritional outcomes of the most vulnerable. This market-driven approach ignores the constitutional mandate of the post-1996 government, which shifted the legal obligation from mere production to universal access. A rights-based approach demands that the food system prioritises nutrient density and accessibility, ensuring that the "Right to Food" is not a hollow promise sold to the highest bidder, but a protected public good.

SAFCEI identifies the current systemic failure as being rooted in industrial agriculture, GMOs, and factory farming, which often prioritise corporate profit over local nutritional needs.

Dominant industrialised livestock systems—specifically intensive factory farming—maintain a facade of affordability by avoiding True Cost Accounting. By externalising the massive costs of environmental destruction, job losses, threat to human health, these systems hide their true impact on the nation:

- **Environmental Degradation:** Industrial systems cause irreversible damage to soil health and biodiversity, while consuming and polluting vast quantities of South Africa's scarce water resources.
- **Air and Soil Pollution:** The concentration of waste in "smart factories" leads to toxic runoff and air quality degradation, disproportionately affecting the health of nearby rural communities.
- **The Threat of Zoonotic Disease:** The extreme confinement of animals in industrial systems creates "viral hotspots," increasing the risk of zoonotic outbreaks that threaten global and local biosecurity.
- **The Silent Crisis: Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR):** The industrial "addiction" to routine antibiotic use—often used to compensate for poor welfare and cramped conditions—is a primary driver of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). This represents a catastrophic failure of governance, as the short-term efficiency of factory farming directly undermines the long-term efficacy of human medicine. Failing to address AMR within livestock systems is a violation of the interconnected health of the population, as it renders future generations vulnerable to previously treatable infections.

Realising the right to food and nutrition requires a moral burden shift—moving the state's focus from corporate profit to the interconnected health of people, animals, and the planet. SAFCEI calls for a unified National Food Sovereignty Act that deconcentrates power and ensures that the future of food is not tethered to technological dependency, but to the dignity of all living beings.

### **Suggested Actions:**

- Genetic Sovereignty and Indigenous Breeds: Central to this dignity is the safeguarding of indigenous livestock genetics. Improving animal welfare must include protecting locally adapted breeds from being displaced by proprietary, high-input industrial genetics. Indigenous breeds are naturally resilient to local climates and pests; preserving them ensures long-term food security and biological diversity while reducing the suffering inherent in intensive, "fast-growth" industrial systems.
- Policy Recommendation: Legislators should pivot toward supporting agroecological systems and nature-based farming that build climate resilience and ensure local food sovereignty.
- Institutional Alignment: Governance must move away from "false solutions" promoted by large industrial foundations and instead focus on systems that empower small-scale African farmers.
- Protect Human Health: By producing chemical-free, nutrient-dense food that addresses the root causes of stunting and disease.
- Respect Animal Dignity: By moving away from caged and intensive systems that rely on pharmaceutical intervention to survive.
- Safeguard the Environment: By restoring soil health and protecting water purity, ensuring that the "Right to an Environment" (Section 24) is fulfilled alongside the "Right to Food."

### **Theme 7 : The Power of Civic Mobilisation**

*The role of civic participation, public accountability, and social movements in advancing the right to food.*

SAFCEI has a long history of mobilising faith-based and civil society networks to demand public accountability and food sovereignty. Established in 2005, SAFCEI has transitioned from general environmental advocacy to a focused rights-based approach that centers the "right to food" as an issue of both social and climate justice.

SAFCEI's experience highlights that civic mobilisation is the most powerful antidote to the "information asymmetry" and corporate capture currently stalling the Right to Food. For SAFCEI, advancing food rights is not just a policy debate but a faith-led social movement that leverages moral authority to demand accountability from both the state and private sectors.

#### **Advancing Food Sovereignty via Social Movements**

SAFCEI asserts that the Right to Food will only be realised when the state's duty to feed is replaced by its duty to create conditions for people to feed themselves.

Realising the right to food requires a multi-sectoral approach. SAFCEI collaborates with over 80 faith communities to galvanise collective action against "reckless" or "false" governance solutions that exacerbate inequality.

## **Faith-Rooted Advocacy and Policy Intervention**

To overcome fragmented governance, SAFCEI utilises its Faith Leader Environmental Advocacy Training (FLEAT) to ensure policy-making is grounded in the lived experiences of diverse communities. Our programme work draws on lived experience, traditional knowledge, and scientific evidence to support local action and advocacy for policy change. We do this through facilitated peer learning platforms—FLEAT and an Earthkeepers’ Fast Action Network (FAN) – and we collaborate with civil society networks with shared objectives, as well as the public, through campaigns and in online spaces.

SAFCEI has intervened in over 110 policy briefs, advocating for coherence across environmental, energy, and food sectors to ensure the right to food is not undermined by conflicting industrial interests.

A powerful continental call for justice arose from Africa’s faith communities. Well over 600 faith leaders from across the continent signed [an open letter to the Gates Foundation](#) in 2025, demanding reparations for the ecological and social harm caused by industrial agriculture and urging a just transition toward agroecology.

### **Suggested Actions:**

- A Colloquium of all SAHRC submission writers to gather and discuss ways forward
- Another Agroecological Conference in South Africa
- Mapping support opportunities
- Further co-research opportunities
- Amplifying small-holder farmers voices & narratives
- Supporting and tapping into existing campaigns with shared visions