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Empowering South African Female Farmers through Organic Lamb Production: A Cost Analysis Case Study

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Abstract : Lamb is a popular meat throughout the world, particularly in Europe, the Middle East and Oceania. However, the conventional lamb industry faces challenges related to environmental sustainability, climate change, consumer health and dwindling profit margins. This has stimulated an increasing demand for organic lamb, as it is perceived to increase environmental sustainability, offer superior quality, taste, and nutritional value, which is appealing to farmers, including small-scale and female farmers, as it often commands a premium price. Despite its advantages, organic lamb production presents challenges, with a significant hurdle being the high production costs encompassing organic certification, lower stocking rates, higher mortality rates and marketing cost. These costs impact the profitability and competitiveness or organic lamb producers, particularly female and small-scale farmers, who often encounter additional obstacles, such as limited access to resources and markets. Therefore, this paper examines the cost of producing organic lambs and its impact on female farmers and raises the research question: “Is organic lamb production the saving grace for female and small-scale farmers?” Objectives include estimating and comparing production costs and profitability or organic lamb production with conventional lamb production, analyzing influencing factors, and assessing opportunities and challenges for female and small-scale farmers. The hypothesis states that organic lamb production can be a viable and beneficial option for female and small-scale farmers, provided that they can overcome high production costs and access premium markets. The study uses a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data involves semi-structured interviews with ten female and small-scale farmers engaged in organic lamb production in South Africa. The interview covered topics such as farm characteristics, practices, cost components, mortality rates, income sources and empowerment indicators. Quantitative data used secondary published information and primary data from a female farmer. The research findings indicate that when a female farmer moves from conventional lamb production to organic lamb production, the cost in the first year of organic lamb production exceed those of conventional lamb production by over 100%. This is due to lower stocking rates and higher mortality rates in the organic system. However, costs start decreasing in the second year as stocking rates increase due to manure applications on grazing and lower mortality rates due to better worm resistance in the herd. In conclusion, this article sheds light on the economic dynamics of organic lamb production, particularly focusing on its impact on female farmers. To empower female farmers and to promote sustainable agricultural practices, it is imperative to understand the cost structures and profitability of organic lamb production.

Keywords : cost analysis, empowerment, female farmers, organic lamb production
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