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# TRANSPORT AND MARKETING OF HORTICULTURAL CROPS BY COMMUNAL FARMERS INTO HARARE

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent studies in the communal areas of Zimbabwe have indicated the future importance of horticultural production, both for home consumption and as a source of income for small-scale farmers (Dambo Research Unit, 1987). However, marketing opportunities within the communal lands are very limited and substantial sales are achieved only from those locations with access to major urban centres, especially Harare. Although horticulture has considerable production potential in the communal lands, it has been suggested that an inadequate transport system and lack of marketing opportunities pose considerable constraints on its development (Chonyera, 1987). Since expansion of this sector is a stated aim of the current five-year National Development Plan, these constraints must be identified and overcome if horticulture is to achieve its full potential in the communal lands (Republic of Zimbabwe, 1986).

To date, studies of horticultural production have been limited in number and hampered by a lack of statistical data. The Dambo Research Unit at the University of Zimbabwe has established the widespread use and further potential for horticulture of gardens located on dambos and stream banks (Dambo Research Unit, 1987). However, with the exception of a consultants' report commissioned for the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development, the few existing studies have concentrated on marketing within the urban system (Cheater, 1979; Drakakis-Smith and Kivell, 1988; Horn, 1986; Peter Thomas and Associates, 1982). Moreover, the Department of Statistics regards horticulture as 'uncontrolled' since crops are not sold through a state marketing board and official information is extremely sparse. For example, the 1982 consultants' report states that it was undertaken

'against a background of virtually no statistical information on production, marketing or consumption of fruit and vegetables' (Peter Thomas and Associates, 1982).

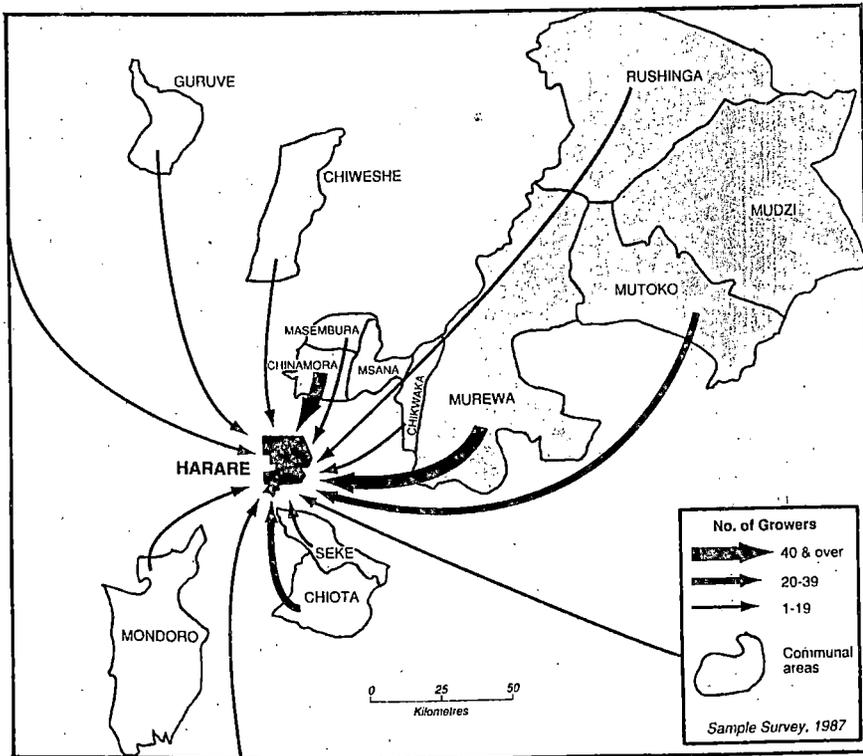
Within this context, a study was initiated in 1987 with the aim of establishing the major characteristics of the transport and marketing systems for horticultural crops into Harare. Emphasis was placed on identifying the constraints in the rural-urban link and their impact on the communal farmers. The findings reported in this paper are based on interviews with almost 200 communal farmers using Mbare growers' market and two private city wholesalers, the Independent Market and the National Fruit and Vegetable Agency. Together, these markets represent the major outlets for horticultural produce in Harare. Survey work was undertaken in January/February and June/July, 1987, in order to identify any seasonal variations in the marketing. The study was undertaken as part of a larger project concerned with the overall development of horticulture in Zimbabwe, including the large-scale commercial sector and the potential for export, thus allowing some wider comparisons to be made (Smith, 1987, 1990).

### THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Since the rural areas and middle order towns throughout northern Zimbabwe offer only limited marketing opportunities for horticultural crops, many communal farmers prefer to travel into Harare to sell their produce. The spatial impact of the Harare market is, therefore, considerable and extends to Mutoko, Guruve and Chegutu in addition to adjacent districts such as Chinamora (Figure 1). Relatively little produce is received from Seke, since growers have a major outlet in Chitungwiza. Of necessity, trips are frequent since fruit and vegetables are produced in small quantities and most are highly perishable. Unlike the commercial farmers, communal farmers have no access to storage facilities and produce deteriorates rapidly once picked. As a result, they generally receive lower prices for their produce than the large-scale farmers. Although crops are produced with family labour, and mainly by the women, men predominate in the marketing process especially in the private markets (Table 1). However, as Dube (1989) has confirmed, women participate in the marketing system from the communal lands adjacent to Harare, such as Chinamora and Seke.

Detailed analysis of the travel patterns of growers illustrate the complexity of their journeys. Most were made in several stages each of which could involve a different transport mode and a separate cost. In the absence of direct access to motorised transport, over 80% of growers had to carry their produce to the main road, a feature which has been noted in other rural areas of the Third World (Barwell *et al.*, 1985). The majority owned either a wheelbarrow or an ox-drawn scotch cart but 16% had to hire transport at a standard charge of between Z\$4 and 5 per day (Table 2).

**Figure 1: Horticultural Marketing into Harare**



**TABLE 1:  
SEX OF GROWERS SELLING IN HARARE MARKETS**

SEX	MARKET		
	Private Wholesale	Mbare (% growers)	Total
Male	78	61	68
Female	22	39	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	100 (N=85)	100 (N=97)	100 (N=182)

Although over 68% of growers had to travel over 1 km to the main road, few problems were encountered except in the resettlement schemes where access roads were often in poor condition (Table 2). Elsewhere, communal farmers have greatly benefited from the post-independence provision of rural access roads (Gitec Consult GMBH, 1988).

TABLE 2:  
FARM TO MAIN ROAD JOURNEYS

DISTANCE		TRANSPORT MODE	
Distance (km)	% growers	Mode	% growers
1.0 or less	32	Porterage	13
1.1 to 3	33	Wheelbarrow	10
3.1 to 5	14	Scotch cart	58
5.1 to 10	7	Private car	2
10.1 and over	2	Lorry	16
not given	12	Other	1
TOTAL	100		100 (N=182)

In contrast, the journey into Harare posed greater problems for the growers. In part, these were the result of the long distances travelled: only 24% of growers were within 50 km of Harare (Table 3). Only 5% had their own motorised transport and, with the exception of those using local haulage firms, 70% brought their produce to Harare on the long-distance buses (Table 3). Few growers reported any problems with the frequency of the bus services since nearly all had access to two or more buses into Harare on each day of the week. However, over half of those dependent on the bus services experienced problems with drivers refusing to take their produce. Nor was the problem solved by using haulage firms since an even higher proportion of users reported problems in getting produce accepted. For the growers this unreliable aspect of their transport often resulted in the crops not reaching the market before they had perished.

Farmers travelling by bus to sell in Mbare market usually hired a cart for the final stage of their journey from the bus terminus to the market. The hire charge for the 300 m trip varied between Z\$1 to \$3 and appeared to be unrelated to the amount of produce carried. In contrast the private wholesalers had negotiated with the bus companies and growers could alight with

TABLE 3:  
JOURNEYS TO MBARE

DISTANCE		TRANSPORT MODE	
Distance ( km)	% growers	Mode	% growers
1 - 25	3	Self and produce by bus	70
26 - 50	21	Self by bus/ produce by lorry	6
51 - 75	24	Self both bus and lorry/ produce by lorry	5
76 - 100	30	Self and produce by lorry	16
101 - 125	10	Private car	3
126 - 150	6		
151 and over	6		
TOTAL	100		100 (N=182)

their produce at the market gate. In addition, the private markets offer a free collection service for produce from the bus terminus.

Overall, the total cost of transporting produce into Harare varied mostly with distance. For many farmers costs bore little relationship to the volume of produce being marketed since the major components were the grower's bus fare and standard charges for cart hire. The cost of transporting produce varied from 25 cents to 75 cents per box, sack or pocket and for the majority of growers marketing small quantities such costs were usually minimal. Transport costs on the survey day were recorded and related to sales on the same day. Table 4 shows that 63% of growers spent more than Z\$10 on transport and that for 66% it accounted for over 20% of the value of their sales. These figures are considerably higher than in the commercial sector where transport costs of 15% to 18% are considered the maximum. For a few communal farmers, sales did not even allow them to recoup their transport costs (Table 4).

### THE MARKETING SYSTEM

Unlike the majority of agricultural output in Zimbabwe, horticultural crops are not marketed through state-controlled boards. However, the Harare marketing system is subject to stringent regulations imposed by the City Council which have a considerable impact on communal farmers.

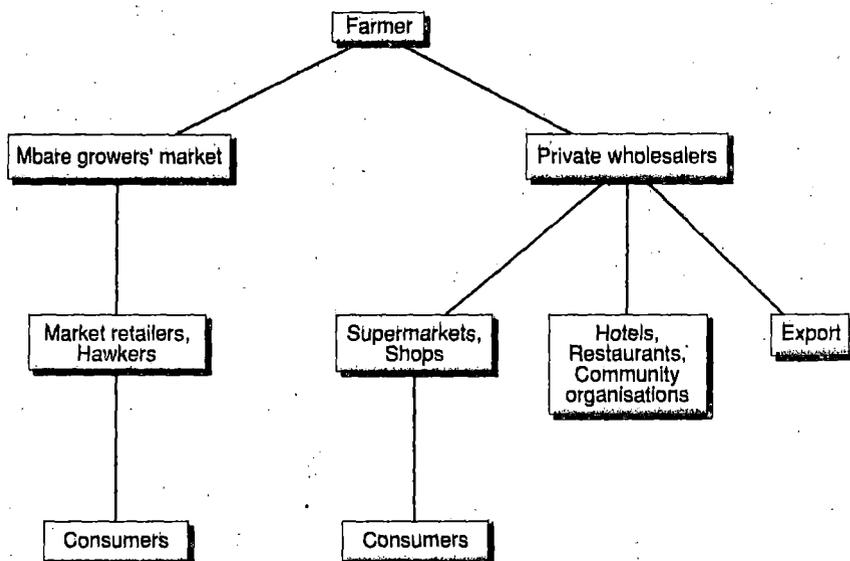
TABLE 4:  
TRANSPORT COSTS AND AS A  
PERCENTAGE OF SALES ON SURVEY DAY

COSTS		PERCENTAGE OF SALES	
Transport Costs	% growers	% Sales	% growers
Less than \$5	3	Less than 10	6
\$5 - 9	34	10 - 19	28
\$10 -14	21	20 -29	24
\$15 -19	14	30 -39	17
\$20 -29	19	40 -59	12
\$30 -39	6	60 -99	11
\$40 and over	3	100 and over	2
TOTAL	100		100 (N=182)

Direct sales to the public are strictly controlled by a licensing system and most growers sell through registered wholesalers and vendors (Figure 2). At Mbare market, farmers sold their produce to the wholesalers: a market fee was charged and all transactions took place within the confines of the growers' market which operates from 4 am to 10 am. In contrast, the two private wholesalers used by the communal farmers offered more flexible hours (6 am to 3 pm) but acted only as intermediaries and sold to retailers on behalf of the growers for a commission charge of 12.5%. Consequently, contrasting patterns of marketing have emerged between Mbare and the private wholesalers.

The distances travelled combined with restricted marketing hours necessitated an overnight stay, especially for growers using Mbare where they were allowed to arrive the previous night and sleep in the market until 4 am (Table 5). A higher proportion of growers using the private wholesalers were able to transact their business within the day since produce was left to be sold and the proceeds were collected on the next visit. As Table 6 indicates, the time spent in Harare was not entirely devoted to marketing: 86% of growers undertook other activities, especially shopping and visiting friends. However, since 78% of those interviewed travelled to Harare at least once a week and 44% at least twice, the selling of fruit and vegetables represented a considerable time commitment for the communal farmers.

**Figure 2: Harare Horticultural Marketing System**



**TABLE 5:  
TIME SPENT AWAY FROM HOME**

TIME (Hrs)	MARKET	
	Private Wholesale (% growers)	Mbare
3 or less	1	-
4 - 6	9	10
7 -12	44	13
13 -18	19	27
19+	27	50
<b>TOTAL</b>	100 (N=85)	100 (N=97)

TABLE 6:  
OTHER ACTIVITIES IN HARARE

ACTIVITY	% growers
Shopping – food	18
Shopping – non-food goods	6
Shopping – food and non-food	36
Shopping and other activities	15
Visiting	10
Entertainment	1
No other activity	14
TOTAL	100 (N=182)

Sixty-three percent of all growers sold produce in Harare throughout the year, although they would only market one or two crops at any one time. There were marked seasonal variations in the types and amounts of products brought to Harare resulting in both shortages and gluts of particular crops. Lack of water in winter was the major factor limiting year-round production although a few farmers chose to concentrate on maize rather than vegetables in the rainy season. Produce sold in Mbare growers' market was mainly retailed in the high density housing areas whereas the private wholesalers supplied restaurants, hotel chains and retailers throughout the northern suburbs of Harare and other urban areas in Zimbabwe (Figure 2). Consequently, Mbare concentrated on a more limited range of 'traditional' vegetables (tomatoes, onions, cabbage, rape, and 'tsunga') and fruits such as mangoes and oranges while the private wholesalers dealt with a much wider range including carrots, peas, beans, squashes, baby marrows and a greater variety of fruits.

All growers reported substantial variations in levels of sales throughout the year. Table 7 summarises sales on the survey day, the annual average, and the highest and lowest sales recorded in the previous six months. The market variations in the latter two categories reflect both the fluctuations in the availability of produce and the difficulties of operating in a market which suffers from over-supply at certain times of the year.

In general, growers using the private wholesalers were more satisfied with the system than those selling at the council-operated market. Whereas 25% of growers registered problems with private wholesalers, the proportion rose to 89% at Mbare where produce was vulnerable to theft and the

**TABLE 7:  
GROSS INCOME PER JOURNEY INTO HARARE**

Gross Income* (Z\$)	On survey day	Overall average (% growers)	Lowest recorded	Highest recorded
Less than 10	6	2	24	—
10 – 19	8	10	22	3
20 – 29	13	14	24	6
30 – 39	12	13	8	3
40 – 49	8	13	5	7
50 – 59	9	16	8	7
60 – 99	17	16	3	21
100 – 199	19	13	4	27
200 and over	8	3	2	26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(N=182)

\* Less private wholesalers' commission/Mbare market rent.

growers, particularly the women, faced harassment from organised groups of buyers (the 'makoronyera'). Moreover, the lack of security at the Mbare market was quoted by many growers as the major reason for their reluctance to sell on behalf of one another. In addition, Mbare market's limited opening hours combined with the lack of storage facilities also disadvantaged growers since any produce not sold by 10 am had to be removed (Table 8). However, such problems were undoubtedly compensated by the volume of sales to the 2000 or so vendors who purchased produce at Mbare daily and sold it throughout the city.

Farmers using the private wholesalers appreciated their produce being sold for them even though they could not fix their own prices and they had to wait for payment. In general, such growers were also more aware of price fluctuations and the importance of good quality. Unlike the growers at Mbare, they were more prepared to bring one another's produce to market since they were operating in a more secure system. The survey indicated that more growers would prefer to market through the private wholesale system but did not have the expertise or the resources to grow crops which those markets required.

**TABLE 8:  
ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MARKETING  
OUTLETS**

ADVANTAGES	MARKET	
	Private wholesale (% growers)	Mbare
Efficiently operated	13	-
Ease of selling	24	10
Accessibility by transport	1	1
Selling done by market	42	-
Good prices	13	6
Direct cash system	-	10
Large number of buyers	5	54
No alternative outlet	-	19
No advantages	2	-
	(N=85)	(N=87)
DISADVANTAGES	MARKET	
	Private wholesale (% growers)	Mbare
Produce not sold	8	3
Low prices	5	1
Commission system	13	-
Inadequate security	-	77
Bargaining system	-	3
Inadequate shelter	-	17
Opening times	-	25
No disadvantages	74	12
	(N=85)	(N=97)

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the pilot survey indicated the need to improve transport links for communal farmers and to modify the marketing system. At present, the majority of growers depend on the rural bus services to transport themselves and their produce to Harare. However, the competitive nature of the rural bus industry during the 1980s has made operators more reluctant to carry high-bulk, low-value horticultural crops (Atkinson Williams Partnership, 1986). In the absence of private transport, an increasing number of growers are turning to independent haulage companies to transport their produce to market. As the survey showed, however, such firms are not able to offer a fully reliable service since many are operating with inadequate or sub-standard fleets. In general, it may be argued that the post-independence road building programme has greatly improved the accessibility of the communal areas to Harare. However, this development programme must be matched by greater levels of investment in the bus and lorry fleet if long distance transport is to be made reliable and communal farmers are to take advantage of increased accessibility. Unfortunately, the transport sector is heavily dependent on imports, both of new vehicles and of spare parts. Given Zimbabwe's foreign debt situation, the supply of vehicles is likely to deteriorate further unless the transport sector receives a larger allocation of scarce resources.

The provision of more reliable transport in the remoter areas producing substantial volumes of fruit and vegetables is the aim of a scheme being sponsored by the European Economic Community and operated by the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) in Mutoko district (Jaure, 1989). Lorries collect produce from communal farmers along pre-determined routes and deliver it to Mbare. The growers travel to Harare by bus and sell their own produce on arrival. The scheme has already provided an important supplement to transport in the area, but its ultimate success and extension to other communal areas, will depend on the size and reliability of ARDA's transport fleet. In the longer term, the project aims to establish grading and wholesale facilities within the Mutoko district, removing the need for farmers to travel to Harare. However, care must be exercised that growers do not become too remote from the market, thereby becoming ignorant of the fluctuations in produce supply and demand.

The opening of a new growers' market in Mbare in 1989 has provided some improvement in selling conditions, but many of the basic problems remain, especially since cold storage facilities were not included in the development. It may also be argued that farmers would benefit both from a relaxing of the City Council controls on selling hours and from being

allowed to sell direct to the public. A more secure marketing system at Mbare would also encourage a greater degree of co-operation among farmers enabling them to conduct business for one another, especially when the individual volumes of sales are very low.

Ultimately, diversification of produce and marketing outlets will be essential if horticulture is to reach its full commercial potential in the communal areas. Several middle order towns, for example Marondera, are poorly supplied with fruit and vegetables and offer opportunities for decentralisation of marketing away from Harare. In this respect, the proposal by a private company to establish a new wholesale market at Chitungwiza is a welcome development. The creation of district and regional service centres in parallel with government's growth pole strategy would also seem to provide possibilities for more local market outlets (Helmsing, 1986). In addition, communal farmers should be encouraged both to widen the range and improve the quality of their produce. This would enable them not only to develop new markets but also to realise higher incomes from their produce. In the longer term it may even lead to a share in the rapidly expanding export market which is currently confined to the commercial farming sector (ARDA, 1983).

## CONCLUSION

Communal farmers face a number of constraints in marketing fruit and vegetables in Harare. The transport of produce can be unreliable, leading to loss of income, and the marketing system often disadvantages the small-scale farmer. To a certain extent, these problems can be overcome by the allocation of more resources to the transport sector and by developing less regulated, but more secure, marketing outlets. However, the full potential of horticultural production in the communal areas will also benefit from decentralization of selling away from Harare, and by making growers more aware of market demands and opportunities.

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