

**Recommendations for *Better Barley, Better Beer* and further research
by Laura Irvine**

Based on her 2016 Dissertation towards her BA Honours Degree:

“Growing People, Growing Barley”:

Cultivating Human Relations on Hoëberg Sustainable Farm

1. Recommendations to improve the implementation of BBBB principles:

Re-centre the human as the primary concern for sustainability.

In my research, sustainability has taken on different meanings, but social sustainability is an aspect that was never articulated directly by any of the actors on the farm during the period I worked there. Sustainability was largely defined as making sure there are resources for your children’s children to use, and farming for tomorrow’s generation instead of surviving day-to-day. While this is important and a large focus of sustainability, one also has to make sure that individuals are able to continue their work to farm for the future: resources without people to use them are just as useless as people with no resources to use.

Currently sustainability is divided into three different foci: environmental, economic and social spheres. While these have been determined by the Brundtland Report and are backed by sound research, I feel that it lacks (or does not communicate effectively) that the human should be at the centre of sustainability. As is commonly argued, sustainability and environmentalism is not to save the world: humans are far too egotistical in thinking that the world will die without their help. In reality the world will just no longer be able to support human life, and so we need to save ourselves rather than the Earth. Re-centring the focus of sustainability around the human still takes into account the environmental and economic necessities of sustainability, but expresses them in a way that makes those implementing the interventions far more sensitive to the needs of people around them.

Implementations that impact workers directly

Following from re-centring the human in a more direct and practical vein, I found that interventions on the farm I worked on did not have a perceived *direct* impact on the conditions of farm workers. While the poison room built is designed to contain harmful substances, workers expressed that it was made to make things tidy, or to stop the chemicals spreading to the water and ground outside. They were not affected by it directly.

- No **safety equipment** was used when spraying herbicides, and no **protocol** was in place when spills occurred (which happen regularly, even if only in small amounts). Focussing on the poison therefore and not concerns for the people handling the poison does not centre the human, and instead makes the poison more important than those handling it.
- **Health care** for workers are also not a priority. One worker had a tooth-ache while I was there, and no treatment was suggested or administered. Farm work is labour intensive, and workers are not given any support should they incur strain of muscles or back pain. **Yearly checkups with a GP** should be included as part of the employment contract, paid for by the employer, and workers should be able to access the necessary care should they suffer from muscle strain or any other work-related injury or illness, without having to take time off and pay for themselves.
- **Workers should be able to voice their concerns** in a forum of some kind that allows them to state what they think is important, lacking or of concern to them. Workers often feel that they cannot voice their concerns for fear of reprimand, and so a way to communicate with the farmer should be explored that allows workers to actively participate in the decision-making concerning their jobs, houses and income.

One cannot just follow the base governmental policies and laws

Policies for social sustainability stem from what is deemed fair and legal by government policy, and unfortunately policy in South Africa does not ensure that employment is truly fair and sustainable for all those involved. “Minimum wage” is very different from a “living wage”, and workers simply cannot survive on R130 a day when they have a family to support as well. They are truly at the mercy of the kindness of their employers. While I understand that implementing and regulating recommendations that are not backed by legislation is difficult and most often will not be taken seriously by those in power, corporations truly interested in holistic sustainability need to start pressuring government to revise their labour policies to reflect a more realistic and sustainable level of employment. This pressure is often created in new research that proves the current policies insufficient, which leads me on to my next subject: recommendations for further research.

2. Recommendations for further research

Long-term anthropological study of a farm implementing sustainable practices

One month was too short to gather all the information needed for a thorough report on sustainable practices and how they impact farm workers. I barely scraped the surface in my thesis, and this is because of my limitations as an Honours degree candidate. I would recommend that a Masters or PhD level thesis is undertaken in order to fully explore all the nuances of the farm at all times of the year. A thorough exploration of farm workers' everyday resistance and exactly what forms these take would also be possible, as well as more practical recommendations as to how to re-centre the human.

Qualitative data of sustainability impact on farmer

While I focussed on farm workers in my thesis, there is also valuable work to be done in understanding how sustainable farming influences the farmer and their own practices on the farm. This has been understood financially in the past but to my knowledge there is no data explaining the behaviour of farmers and their ability to make decisions independent of their clients and the markets.

Policy study and what it would mean to re-centre sustainability around humanity

This last recommendation speaks to the need to re-think governmental policy and how it can better cater for the people within the system and not only look after maximum production or gain. Large structural change does not happen overnight, but we need to start looking at the possibilities for the future in the hope that small changes can lead to larger ones. Once legislation reflects the needs of those in positions with the least amount of power, exploitation and marginalisation will hopefully be far more difficult to go unnoticed. I believe that the only way to truly become sustainable as a business or country is to re-centre the human, and everything else of concern will fall into place once people are taken care of and validated in their needs and individuality.

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