

Rising livestock theft poses risk to SA farmers

The one issue I haven't written about, but is increasingly a challenge in some areas, is livestock theft and crop and fruit theft. The data on some of these issues is scant, but I was reminded of this when Statistics South Africa released its [Governance, Public Safety, and Justice Survey results](#).

 By [Wandile Sihlobo](#) 27 Aug 2025

Table 20 – Type and number of livestock stolen, 2024/25

Type of livestock stolen	Number of types of livestock stolen ('000)	Number of livestock stolen				
		1	2	3	4	5+
Cattle	37 947	6 972	9 665	1 887	1 060	18 363
Pigs	2 281	695		1 015	571	
Sheep	27 852	5 678	2 831	2 600	2 102	14 641
Goats	61 352	10 163	11 434	2 916	3 370	33 469
Poultry (chicken, ducks, etc)	36 486	2 558	2 623	4 254	6 532	20 519
Dogs (excl. Pets)	995	995				
Horses, donkeys, mules	1 690	685	379	626		

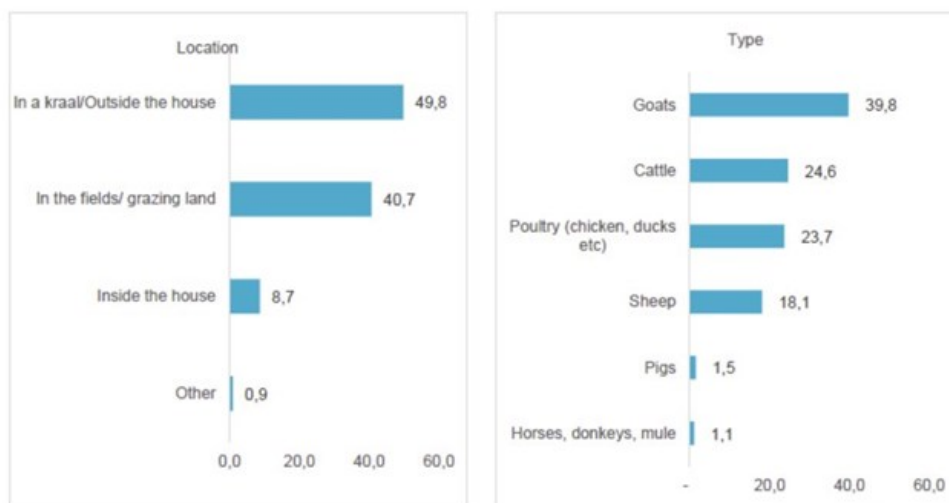
In the agricultural section, Statistics South Africa indicated that in 2024/25, there were over 61,000 goats stolen, followed by cattle (37,947), then poultry (36,486).

Statistics South Africa also provided a valuable table below, which illustrates the locations where theft of livestock occurred and the type of livestock that was stolen in 2024/25.

We can see here that nearly half of the incidences occurred in a kraal/outside the house, followed by when livestock is in the fields/grazing land (40,7%).

In terms of what the thieves are after, we can see that the goats (39,8%) were the most common livestock that was stolen, followed by cattle (24,6%) in 2024/25.

Figure 35 – Percentage distribution of location where incidences of theft of livestock occurred and type, 2024/25



If we want to continue having a prosperous agricultural sector, we must put strong control on these issues. This could be through enhanced collaboration between the police services and organised agriculture

groups.

The theft incidences present enormous costs to farmers and agribusinesses. In fact, if one talks to any commercial farmer, they would learn that over time, there is significant spending on security. I have seen several farmers installing cameras and several security measures due to concerns about crime.

Impact on new entrants and smallholders

For new entrant farmers, who may also have a relatively weak financial muscle, stock theft may take some out of business. The same is true for smallholder farmers who are also victims of such crimes, leaving households in a worse-off position.

Indeed, crime and theft are not unique to South Africa. We have seen [cases of avocado theft in Mexico](#) and other regions of the world. In New Zealand, they [have also struggled with similar issues of avocado theft](#).

The response in these countries has generally been enhanced collaboration between farmers and police services. It is such a response that we must also see in South Africa, at a much-improved level than we currently see.

We must also not forget that South Africa continues to view agriculture as one of the key sectors to our long-term growth agenda. To achieve the long-term growth objectives, we not only need the release of over two million hectares of government land to farmers with title deeds, but also an increase in investment.

The investment will increase if there is comfort about the security in our sector. Thus, issues of crime must also be prioritised and addressed swiftly.

Creating confidence for the next generation

We are also at a space where we, as a country, are encouraging young people to join the sector. For the young and new entrant farmers to thrive and have confidence in the sector, there must be a security improvement. Therefore, fighting crime should remain a top priority in collaboration with organised agriculture.

Again, we are only talking about livestock here, but [we know of incidents of crop and fruit theft in some regions of the country](#), which also requires serious attention.

Agriculture is an essential sector of our economy, with great potential for job creation and improvement of economic conditions in rural South Africa; therefore, ensuring that farmers are operating in a safe and sound environment is key.

ABOUT WANDILE SIHLOBO

Wandile Sihlobo is an agricultural economist and head of agribusiness research at the Agricultural Business Chamber (Agbiz) in South Africa. He is a columnist for Business Day and Farmers Weekly magazine.
[View my profile and articles...](#)