The commodification of tree-crops amongst smallholders and the broader implications for household access to food

**Research questions**
1. How does orchard expansion affect orchard owners and landless households ability to access food?
2. How does social differentiation amongst tree-crops farmers affect access to food?
3. What is the nature of land access arrangements in orchards?
4. What might the future implications of these findings mean for land access arrangements and food production?

**Study site**
- Former ‘homeland’, Vhembe district, Limpopo Province
- History of colonization and apartheid has left structural legacy of dispossession and poverty
- Vhembe district characterized by poor services, high unemployment and poverty
- Densely populated area with mounting pressure and competing claims on land for residential and agricultural purposes
- Communal land tenure system
- A few hundred commercially oriented small-scale farmers engaged in subtropical fruit production, farming on average between 5-10ha plots

**General characteristics of farmers ‘HANGING IN’ THROUGH STATE GRANTS**
- The majority of farmers rely on state pensions as main income source
- State pensions required to meet immediate and long term need for social reproduction and to invest in orchards
- Land demarcated for orchards has multiple uses
  - (i) provides livelihoods and food for those with customary land rights
  - (ii) provides opportunities for landless households to negotiate access/usage rights to grow staple food
- Growing food crops is an important “in-between” strategy while waiting for orchards to mature and generate income especially amongst those who depend solely on land based livelihoods

**Implication for land and food access**
- Cultivation of staple food crops inside orchards is an important strategy to ensure access to food
- Financially unable to cultivate total area of land leads to sharing arrangements
- Women who don’t have access to land want to grow maize for subsistence
- Sharing arrangements are mutually beneficial

**General characteristics of farmers ‘INCHING UP’ THROUGH NON-AGRICULTURAL INCOME**
- Formal off-farm employment, usually as civil servant, provides capital for gradual on-farm investment and orchard expansion
- Farming undertaken as entrepreneurial activity
  - Focuses on single commodity, replicating commercial farming on a smaller scale
  - Relies primarily on hire labour

**Implication for land and food access**
- Orchard expansion and capital accumulations is slow, resulting in land sharing based on benevolent of land owners
- Land becomes available to landless households for staple food production
- Own production of food usually very limited where it does exist

**General characteristics of farmers ‘MOVING UP AND OUT’**
- Non-farm income from multiple sources used as capital to establish and maintain the farm
- Surplus is generated and used to expand production area, upgrade production process and diversify out of agriculture
- Expanding production usually happens through maximizing production capacity of land and expanding into newly acquired land, purchased from farmers unable to sustain their own orchards

**Implication for land and food access**
- Exclusion of others from land access for food production based on both material and economic imperatives
- Employment of labour facilitates economic means to access food

**Land-sharing, intercropping and exclusion**
- Land-sharing arrangements are common due to underutilized land
- Seasonal vegetable and staple crops provide important source of household food and income

**Conclusions**
1. Orchards make a small yet important contribution towards household food access, both for orchard owners and for landless households
   - This happens in two ways:
     - (i) through access to land for food production (intercropping seasonal and staple crops between trees)
     - (ii) economic resources ensure ability to purchase food
2. Orchards contribute most to household food security where there is no additional non-agricultural livelihood activity or where pension grants provide the primary livelihood
3. Land-sharing is based on reciprocity and/or benevolence and occurs primarily amongst resource poor farmers and contributes towards food access among the poorest landless households
4. Land sharing arrangements are changing, largely driven by the materiality of tree-crops, changing social relations and processes of accumulation and expansion. This leads to exclusion of landless households posing a risk to food production for the poorest households into the future