



Cape Town's remnant farmland in the Philippi Horticultural Area highlights the tensions of urban growth – particularly housing people versus feeding people – and having land that performs ecosystem services in the metropole. This case study homes in on a local example of a global phenomenon of the tussle for land use.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST



As far as picturesque farmlands go, the Philippi Horticultural Area (PHA) on Cape Town's Cape Flats, is far from bucolic. The city's footprint has expanded over the decades, eating into more and more of the green open spaces of the wider peninsula, which once were its breadbasket.

Today, the PHA is an island of about 3000ha of green in the spreading sea of urban sprawl: some lies fallow; some is mined for sand; some is used for pastures; and some is hard at work producing fresh vegetables. The urban edge has encircled it with sloughing vibracrete walls. Small industrial parks press in around it, with rusting car carcasses in the back yard, and there are regimented blocks of low-cost houses, and spreading informal neighbourhoods. Not much of the farmland is pretty these days.

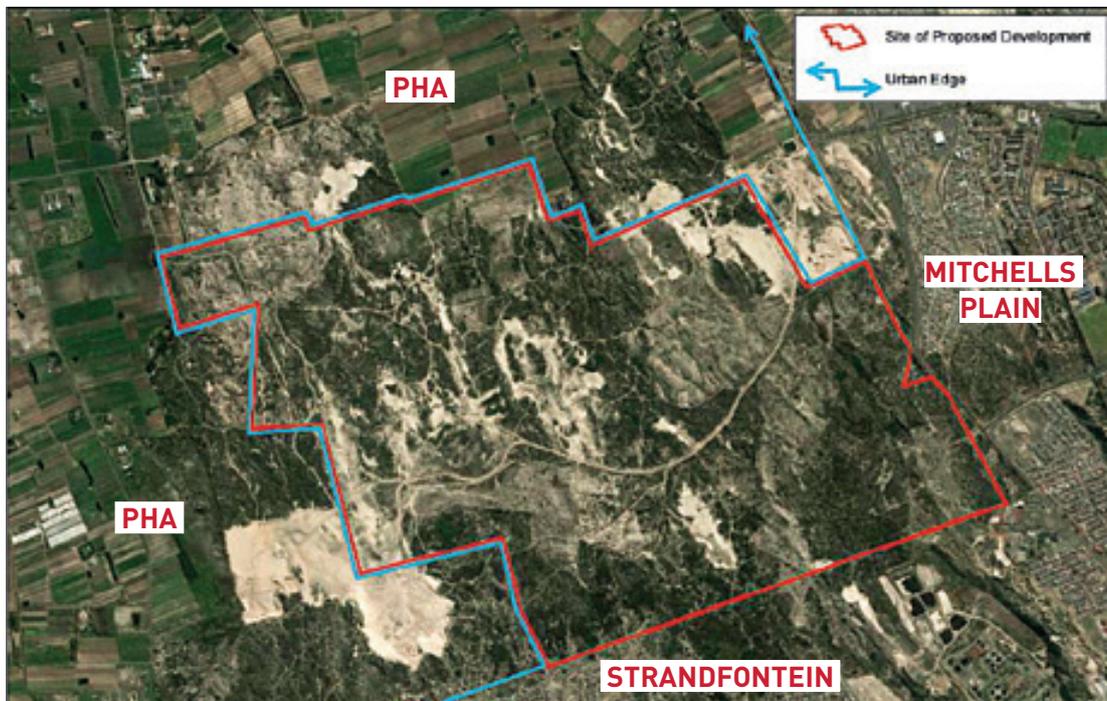
The PHA is at the heart of a contest for land in a city that has a shortage of affordable housing, where businesses are demanding more industrial space from which to operate, and where disparate groups of farmers are working the land, some reluctantly, some willingly, and with questionable profitability.

Losing this green open space – and with it the potential to trickle-feed fresh produce into the city's food system, and water into an aquifer that lies in the bedrock beneath – is where some of the big questions lie about whether or not this land should

be subdivided, paved over, and converted to houses, shopping malls, or industrial complexes. Because once the transformation is done, it's irreversible, say critics of the recent municipal ruling to give the go-ahead for development of the bottom southeastern corner of the PHA.

The City of Cape Town recently upheld its decision to rezone a section of land here that makes up about 15% of the total PHA. It consists of 22 individual plots that, together, make up 472ha, and is owned by private corporation, Rapicorp 122. The property is vacant apart from a few legal and illegal sand mining operations, and there is no agricultural activity taking place currently, and no buildings or structures on this property. Rapicorp applied to Cape Town in 2015 to have the area rezoned from agricultural-only use in order to allow "mixed development". This, according to their application, will include residential housing, educational facilities, office and retail space, industrial parks, and civic, community, and conservation land uses.

Rezoning this cluster of plots, known collectively as "Oakland City", has been questioned by local food security and water experts, and contested by the farming activist organisation PHA Food & Farming Campaign (FFC), which claims to speak for small emerging black farmers. Losing this corner, bordered by Strandfontein and Mitchell's Plain, amounts to what they agree is "death by a thousand cuts":



The City of Cape Town recently upheld its decision to rezone a section of land that makes up about 15% of the total Philippi Horticultural Area. The 472ha area known as Oakland City is currently vacant and developer Rapicorp 122 has ambitions to build a mixed use development here.

shave off enough small pieces here and there, and eventually there will be nothing left of the PHA.

Adjacent to the Oakland City section is another 96ha area that has also been put before the city council for rezoning for development by Uvest Property Group. So far, this rezoning application has not been approved.

The bureaucratic processes that track the rezoning decision by city council are complex, and the details are beyond the scope of this article. There are more questions than answers on the broader matter of whether to keep the PHA in its current state – green open space, and therefore available for agriculture and other ecological services – or develop it (a decision that is inherently political). For now, the only thing standing in the way of the 472ha Oakland City land being released for development is if the FFC follows through with its plan to ask the Western Cape High Court to overturn Cape Town’s rezoning decision. FFC convenor Nazeer Soudy confirms a court battle is being planned.

CALORIES IN, CALORIES OUT: VALUING THE LAND

Do the citizens of Cape Town need the PHA to supply the local food value chain, when the regional food system allows fresh produce to be shipped in from just about anywhere in southern Africa? From a consumers’ perspective, does it matter if a hectare of the PHA is feeding calories into the food system by supplying it with produce directly from a farmer’s field, or through a supermarket built on that hectare?

According to food security researchers at the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) African Centre for Cities (ACC), it does matter, it’s complicated, and there are too many unknowns to understand the risks associated with allowing the development to go ahead.

“What will Cape Town’s food system look like if it lost the PHA? That’s difficult to answer,” explains ACC’s Dr Gareth Haysom. “The food system is diverse, and functions well, but it’s complex and constantly changing. It’s influenced by so many local, regional, and global shifts: currency fluctuations, or a flood of food into the market from another region, for instance.”

Consider the current drought, which he says will impact on farm outputs in the city vicinity.

“How will this impact local food supply, if the city is importing food from places like Limpopo, where the drought is less severe? In this continual state of flux in the food system, the PHA is a constant,” Haysom elaborates. “It allows a level of certainty in



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While supermarkets are connected to a larger, commercial supply chain through nationwide networks, smaller informal traders are hit hard by a decrease in cheaper, locally-grown fresh produce.

an uncertain system. It keeps healthy, affordable food coming into the city. As soon as fresh produce is imported from afar, it increases the cost, and the carbon footprint.”

While supermarkets are connected to a larger, commercial supply chain through networks across the country, and often benefit from the integration of the network and the economies of scale that come with it (for instance, many larger retailers also own the shipping, packaging and warehousing processes), smaller informal traders are hit hard by a decrease in cheaper, locally-grown fresh produce. This ripples through to most consumers.

The ACC has done several studies of the extent of the food system in Cape Town, and how formal retailers and the informal food sector operate within it. In summary, they found that informal traders – including street vendors, fresh produce vendors, house shops and spaza shops – are largely undervalued in terms of their contribution to meeting the nutritional needs of the city’s inhabitants. Informal traders may have less of a mark-up on their produce, compared with bigger retailers where longer value chains have more profit-taking along the way. They sell closer to people’s homes or along important transport routes for people using public transport or moving on foot. They also often offer credit to cash-strapped families who wouldn’t get it at large chain stores.

Lower-income families often don't have electricity or refrigeration at home, and live far from shopping centres. This, explains Haysom, means they can't buy in bulk or transport food home in taxis, which forces them to buy on a daily basis and from hawkers who operate within easy walking distance of their homes.

These are all important in allowing poorer households to remain food-resilient. Cutting off a supply of locally grown, affordable fresh produce by pinching back the supply to informal traders will have a direct bearing on the price and availability of healthy food for many Capetonians.

Supermarkets don't necessarily fill the gap left if informal traders are pushed out of the system, according to the ACC reports. Even though big retailers are spreading into lower income communities around Cape Town, they are not necessarily bringing the benefits of economies of scale to bear, in terms of allowing access to affordable, healthy foods within these communities. Haysom and his colleague, Dr Jane Battersby, found that supermarkets tend to speed up the "nutritional transition" as people abandon traditional, healthier foods and switch to processed and packaged foods

that might be cheaper, have a longer shelf life, or be high status foods owing to their branding and packaging.

Even though many studies have focused on the contribution of the PHA's agricultural activities to the local economy, the data is flawed for various reasons. Haysom, Battersby and their team note in the 2014 report, *Food System and Food Security Study for the City of Cape Town*, that the agricultural census data used by Cape Town in its analysis only captures commercial farming crops, and therefore misses the smaller operators selling into local markets. It also excludes low-value staple vegetables, or higher-value but small volume herbs.

Another report by Battersby and Haysom – the 2012 *PHA: a City asset or potential development node?* – found that agricultural production expanded here between 2009 and 2012, and that over 50 different crop types fed into the city's food system through various formal and informal channels. Farmers reported selling about 80% of their produce directly to retailers, 12% went through the city's fresh produce market, and another 2% was sold directly to informal traders. Their survey did not

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Cutting off a supply of locally grown, affordable fresh produce by pinching back the supply to informal traders will have a direct bearing on the price and availability of healthy food for many Capetonians as supermarkets won't necessarily fill that gap.

support the oft-repeated claim that 47% or so of the city's fresh produce comes from the PHA, however.

THE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT: RECHARGING THE AQUIFER, AND GAPS IN THE ACCOUNTING

While the number crunching is being done on the economic value of the agricultural and development potential of the PHA, water expert Dr Kevin Winter from UCT's Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences is concerned that some of the often "invisible" ecosystem services provided by the natural environment here are not being factored into the accounting system used to quantify the value of the area.

The CFA spans about 450km², stretching from Table Bay in the west, across the airport industrial area to Sir Lowry's Pass, and south to the False Bay coastline, and as far as the Tygerberg Hills in the north. A 2010 article in the journal *Water SA* states that the aquifer could supply about 5% of the city's water needs, at the rate of water use in the pre-restriction conditions of 2016. But Winters says this could stretch to as much as a third if the aquifer recharge is carefully monitored and managed, and if demand is reduced to levels that are sustainable and in line with drought-condition usage.

"Cape Town currently can lose as much as 18% of its above-ground stored water in summer due to evaporation, but the aquifer is an important

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DR KEVIN WINTER, UCT ENVIRONMENTAL AND
GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCES

Green open spaces like the PHA offer a buffer against extreme weather events associated with climate change.

Open grasslands mop up flood waters, allowing it to percolate into the groundwater in dry months, while natural wetlands and ponding areas allow groundwater to pool as it rises every winter during the rainy season; during heat waves, vegetated areas don't suffer the same heat spikes associated with urban heat islands in built-up areas; trees can provide windbreaks, while pastures are firebreaks (wind speed and the likelihood of dry, windy "fire weather" are expected to increase in a hotter, drier Western Cape, according to UCT's climate modelling); the Cape Flats aquifer (CFA), which lies beneath the PHA, can supplement water supply during times of drought, and be an important alternative water storage facility as the city faces on-going water shortages.

alternative storage option," says Winter. "We need not only to be looking to the mountains to collect our water. We don't need more dams. We have an underground storage facility which is a smart climate proofing strategy."

The entire city is itself a water catchment for this aquifer, with twice as much water falling across the Cape Flats and the city bowl than the city's actual demand, according to Winter. Much of this water is not currently being captured, and boreholes could also be points through which to recharge the aquifer.

The PHA itself isn't that important for the recharge of the total aquifer – the broader cityscape needs to be viewed holistically for its multiple recharge points – but Winter notes that if we want to "climate proof" the city, then these other ecosystem services provided by the PHA need to be considered seriously in terms of Cape Town's broader response to climate change.



An artists impression of the proposed development planned for the southeast corner of the PHA, with a mix of residential, retail and industrial.

THE CITY OF CAPE TOWN'S "MASTERPLAN", AND MAKING FARMING PROFITABLE

The City of Cape Town is working on a masterplan that will inform future decisions relating to the PHA, although this won't be in time to address the Oakland Park decision. The draft Municipal Spatial Development Framework (MSDF) went out for public comment between July 30 and September 26, and, once approved, will provide "policy certainty" until 2022, according to councillor Brett Herron, City of Cape Town Mayoral Committee member for Transport and Urban Development. The current draft considers the PHA, and wider concerns relating to a food system that it acknowledges must be "accessible and affordable", particularly to lower income communities.

Herron says the MSDF will also consider "numerous studies previously conducted (on the PHA) by many organisations", as well as the recently commissioned Socio-Economic Agricultural Plan (SEAP), called for by Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Economic Development and Tourism Alan Winde in April this year. However, Herron said the SEAP is unlikely to be completed in less than a year and doesn't expect this to give any new insights into the PHA as it is uncertain that any new primary research will be undertaken and will likely only draw from existing studies.

Meanwhile Winde, whose department is a commenting authority in the City of Cape Town's rezoning decision, argues that one of the best ways of protecting the agricultural land in the PHA is to encourage middle-class, hobby farming. If gentleman farmers such as those in Constantia own the land and are not dependent on its agricultural outputs to make a living, then market forces will buffer against urban sprawl, crime, and dumping of waste (the latter both devalue the area).

Another mechanism is to ensure that agriculture is profitable. One way of doing this, Winde suggests, is to "disrupt" the current food system by cutting out middlemen and subverting the supermarket system, both of which absorb big chunks of the profits on food production, by finding ways to deliver produce directly from the farmer to the customer. ☪

SOURCEBOOK

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Download the **Oakland City final heritage impact assessment report** at bit.ly/ew_philippi