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Evaluating Market Participation of Resource-constrained Smallholder Farmers in Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT Linking rural smallholder farmers to mainstream markets remains a challenge for South Africa, despite favourable policies and funding opportunities. This is a quantitative research design evaluating the challenges and possible complementarities associated with farmers' market participation in the former homelands of the Eastern Cape Province. A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to the purposively selected sample of 210 smallholder farmers. Data were analysed using a probit regression model. The findings revealed the important role that farmer characteristics play in market participation. Most notably, results revealed that if farming is left in the hands of elderly people who lack the physical ability to perform the manual tasks that characterise the system, it results in a slow transition into market-oriented agriculture. This calls for strategies to improve farm methods with technological advancements that are either age-friendly or attract young people into farming.