

Effect of Farmer-Herder Conflicts on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of farmer-herder conflicts on food security in Benue State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 375 respondents comprising farmers, herders, community leaders, and government officials using a structured questionnaire and key informant interviews. The findings revealed that the causes of farmer-herder conflicts include competition over land and water resources, crop destruction by cattle, climate change-induced migration, proliferation of arms, and weak policy implementation. The conflicts were characterized by violent attacks, mass killings, displacement of farming communities, and destruction of farmlands and properties. As a result, agricultural productivity has drastically declined due to abandoned farms, reduced crop yields, loss of livestock, and disrupted market supply chains, leading to high food prices. The conflicts were also found to have negatively affected food security, reducing food availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability, with many families skipping meals or depending on less nutritious food. The study concluded that farmer-herder conflicts pose a serious threat to agricultural development and food security in Benue State. It recommended effective land-use policies, strengthened conflict resolution mechanisms, improved security measures, and livelihood support for affected households to mitigate the impact of the conflicts.

Keywords: *Farmer-herder conflict; food security; agricultural productivity; displacement; Benue State; resource competition.*

Introduction

Agriculture remains a critical component of Nigeria's economy, accounting for approximately 23–24% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing over 70% of employment in rural communities (Nwankwo, 2024; Ayomitunde, 2020). The sector supports mainstream livelihoods, enhances food availability, and serves as a foundation for industrial and economic growth. Odetola and Etumnu (2022) assert that growth in agriculture consistently contributes to broader economic development in Nigeria, particularly through the crop production subsector.

Benue State epitomizes this national significance and is widely known as the "Food Basket of the Nation." More than 70% of its working population engage in farming (Ioryue, Jimoh & Ejeh, 2025). The state leads national production in crops such as soybeans, cassava, mangoes, and oranges, and ranks second in yam and third in rice outputs (Rpublc, 2023). The renowned Zaki Ibiam Yam Market in the state is considered the largest yam market in Nigeria, underlining the central role of Benue in the country's agricultural trade (Nda, 2023). Subsistence and commercial farming form the backbone of rural household economies in Benue State. Crops like yam, maize, cassava,

soybeans, millet, and sesame are produced both for local consumption and for supply to national markets (Nda, 2023). Most farm families manage small plots with limited mechanization, which constrains large-scale production but sustains food diversity and rural resilience. Livestock production, which includes cattle, goats, poultry, and pigs, is also widely practiced, providing household income, nutritional protein, and market exchange opportunities. However, mechanized or intensive animal production methods remain relatively limited (Onyeneke, Olayide & Tassie, 2023). Together, crop and livestock agriculture underpin food security, income generation, and employment across rural Benue, thereby contributing significantly to national food reserves and household wealth creation.

Traditionally, relations between sedentary farmers primarily Tiv, Idoma, and Iggede and nomadic Fulani herders in Nigeria followed a seasonal rhythm. Herders moved south during the dry season along established transhumance routes, grazing cattle on crop residues and fallow land before returning north during the rainy season. This arrangement was mutually beneficial as cattle dung fertilized farmland (Bloem, Bello & Yusuf, 2025). However, the expansion of farmlands, encroachment on grazing corridors, and population growth have disrupted these patterns. Many herders now pass through cultivated lands, leading to crop destruction and violent clashes (Aniche, Okolie & Egbuta, 2022). The intensification of farmer-herder conflicts is linked to competition over scarce natural resources. Climate change, manifesting as desertification, drought, and land degradation in northern Nigeria, has reduced available pasture and water resources, pushing pastoralists further south into fertile states like Benue (Mullen, 2023). At the same time, Nigeria's rapidly growing population and increasing demand for food have intensified land-use pressures. The cattle population is projected to increase from 25 million to over 60 million by 2050, worsening grazing challenges (Fabiya & Otunuga, 2016). Recent reports indicate that farmer-herder clashes have displaced more than 2.2 million people in Benue and neighboring states between 2019 and 2025 (Jaiyesimi, 2025).

Although tensions between farmers and herders have existed for decades, violent clashes became more pronounced in the

2000s and escalated in the 2010s. The 2016 Agatu massacre, in which about 500 people were killed and thousands displaced, marked a major turning point in Benue State (Agatu Conflict Report, 2016). Subsequent attacks, such as the 2021 Odugbeho massacre and the April 2022 Guma killings, further underscored the persistent insecurity. In 2025, Yelewata witnessed one of the deadliest attacks, with over 100 deaths reported (Jaiyesimi, 2025). Despite the enactment of the 2017 Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, weak enforcement has limited its effectiveness, and the conflict continues to escalate (Otaida & Audu, 2022).

The causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State are multidimensional and rooted in increasing competition over scarce natural resources. First, competition for arable land and water resources has intensified as expanding farmlands reduce available grazing areas for pastoralists. Second, frequent destruction of crops by roaming cattle often sparks retaliatory attacks by farmers. Third, cattle rustling and theft of livestock have provoked violent reprisals from herders. Finally, the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the weakening of customary institutions have eliminated effective platforms for mediation, leading to cycles of revenge and escalating violence (Agatu 2016; Odugbeho 2021; Guma 2022; Yelewata 2025). The farmer-herder conflict in Benue State has escalated over the years from isolated disputes into widespread violent clashes with devastating humanitarian and economic consequences. The intensification of the conflict has resulted in recurrent attacks, leading to massive loss of lives, destruction of farmlands, and forced displacement of farming communities. Several deadly incidents, including massacres in Agatu, Guma, and Odugbeho, highlight the growing scale and brutality of the clashes. As violence spreads, thousands of residents have been uprooted from their homes and relocated to internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, while vast farmlands are abandoned, aggravating food insecurity and economic hardship in the state (Ioryue, 2024; Izirshar et al., 2025).

Food security refers to a situation where all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. It is often conceptualized under four dimensions: availability, accessibility, utilization, and

stability (FAO, 1996; Smith, 2021). Availability relates to the supply of food from production and markets, accessibility focuses on people's ability to obtain food, utilization emphasizes the nutritional quality and safety of food, while stability concerns consistent access to food over time (Adekunle, 2023).

Empirical studies reveal that the escalation of farmer-herder conflicts significantly undermines agricultural productivity and food supply in Nigeria. Nnaji, Chukwu, and Odo (2019) found that increased conflict risk perception discourages farmers from investing in fertilizer use and cropland, resulting in reduced yields and lower household food availability. Similarly, Eze (2021) reported that insecurity disrupts farm labor allocation, decreases farm income, and weakens rural markets. Izirshar, Ogbe, and Lawal (2025) further demonstrated that a 1% rise in insecurity leads to a 0.211% drop in crop output and a 0.311% decline in livestock production. The economic losses associated with these conflicts are estimated to exceed \$12 billion annually in North-Central Nigeria, including Benue State (Musa & Ibrahim, 2024). Benue State, Nigeria's "Food Basket of the Nation," has been severely affected by farmer-herder clashes. Violent incidents such as the 2016 Agatu massacre, the 2021 Odugbeho killings, and the 2025 Yelewata attacks have led to mass displacement, loss of farmlands, and destruction of stored harvests (Agatu Conflict Report, 2016; Odugbeho Massacre Report, 2021; Jaiyesimi, 2025). These attacks have forced thousands of farmers to abandon their farms, leading to substantial reductions in the cultivation of staple crops such as yam, maize, cassava, and rice (Ifedayo, 2023).

The resulting scarcity has contributed to significant increases in food prices across the state and beyond. Eze (2021) observed that recurring conflicts disrupt both production and distribution networks, leading to unstable markets, reduced dietary diversity, and worsening hunger among households. According to Ioryue (2024), the abandonment of fertile farmlands in Benue has created severe risks of famine, particularly in rural communities dependent on agriculture for subsistence and income. It is against this background that this study analyzes the threats of farmer-herder conflicts on food security in Benue State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State have escalated into a major security and developmental crisis, undermining the state's role as Nigeria's "Food Basket of the Nation." Once peaceful and mutually beneficial relationships between farmers and herders have broken down due to increasing competition for land and water, frequent crop destruction, cattle rustling, and the collapse of traditional conflict resolution systems. These clashes have led to widespread killings, displacement of farming communities, destruction of farmlands, and abandonment of agricultural activities. As a result, crop and livestock production have drastically declined, food prices have soared, and many households face hunger and poverty. Despite government interventions such as anti-open grazing laws, weak enforcement and persistent insecurity continue to threaten food availability, accessibility, and stability, creating a serious risk of famine and economic hardship for both Benue State and the nation at large. It is against this backdrop that this study analyzes the threats of farmer-herder conflicts on food security in Benue State, Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of farmer-herder conflicts on food security in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State.
2. Analyze the nature of the farmer-herder conflicts.
3. Assess the impact of farmer-herder conflicts on agricultural productivity and market supply in Benue State.
4. Determine the effects of the conflicts on food availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State?
2. What is the nature of the farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State?
3. How do farmer-herder conflicts affect agricultural productivity and market supply in Benue State?
4. What are the effects of farmer-herder conflicts on food availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability in Benue State?

Literature Review

Agriculture plays a central role in Nigeria's economy,

contributing significantly to employment, income generation, and food supply. It accounts for a large proportion of the nation's GDP and serves as the primary source of livelihood for the majority of rural households (Ojo & Adebayo, 2021). Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation," is particularly vital to Nigeria's agricultural output due to its fertile land and favorable climatic conditions for the cultivation of crops such as yam, rice, maize, cassava, and soybeans (Ioryue, 2024). Agriculture not only ensures food availability and stability but also drives rural economic development, making it indispensable to national food security and poverty reduction (Musa & Ibrahim, 2024).

However, the growing incidence of farmer-herder conflicts poses a major threat to agricultural development and food security in Nigeria. These conflicts, which were initially localized disputes over grazing land and water resources, have escalated into violent clashes resulting in loss of lives, destruction of farmlands, and mass displacement of farming communities (Eze, 2021). The conflicts disrupt agricultural activities, reduce productivity, and hinder market access, thereby weakening food availability, accessibility, and stability. Studies have shown that recurring clashes in Benue State have forced many farmers to abandon their farmlands, leading to a decline in crop yields and a surge in food prices (Ifedayo, 2023; Jaiyesimi, 2025). As such, farmer-herder conflicts have become a serious developmental and humanitarian challenge, undermining the state's agricultural potential and Nigeria's overall food supply.

Conceptual Clarification

Farmer-herder conflict refers to disputes and violent clashes between sedentary crop farmers and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists, primarily over the use of land and water resources for farming and grazing (Ioryue, 2024). Traditionally, farmers and herders coexisted in a symbiotic relationship where herders grazed their cattle on farmlands after harvest, providing manure to enrich the soil. However, increasing competition for land, population growth, and changing grazing patterns have intensified conflicts, often resulting in violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods (Eze, 2021).

Food security is a multidimensional concept defined as a situation where all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food

that meets their dietary needs for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996; Adekunle, 2023). Its four key pillars include availability, referring to the supply of food through production and imports; accessibility, which involves people's ability to obtain food physically and economically; utilization, relating to the nutritional value and safe preparation of food; and stability, meaning consistent access to adequate food over time (Smith, 2021).

Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflicts

One of the primary causes of farmer-herder conflicts is competition over land and water resources. As population increases and farmland expands, traditional grazing routes are encroached upon, forcing herders to graze on cultivated lands, thereby destroying crops and sparking retaliation (Ifedayo, 2023). Crop destruction by cattle has been reported as a major source of tension, as farmers incur huge losses when their fields are trampled or grazed upon during critical growing seasons (Jaiyesimi, 2025).

Cattle rustling has also contributed to the escalation of violence. The theft of livestock by criminal groups often triggers reprisal attacks by herders against farming communities perceived as complicit, thereby worsening insecurity (Eze, 2021).

Climate change and desertification are additional factors driving the conflict. Reduced rainfall, desert encroachment, and land degradation in northern Nigeria have forced many herders to migrate southward into the fertile Middle Belt, including Benue State, thereby increasing competition for limited resources (Musa & Ibrahim, 2024).

Another key factor is the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Historically, disputes between farmers and herders were resolved through local authorities and community elders. However, these mechanisms have weakened due to politicization, erosion of communal authority, and lack of trust among stakeholders, leading to unresolved disputes and cycles of violence (Ioryue, 2024).

Nature of the Farmer-herder Conflict in Benue State

The farmer-herder conflict in Benue State has evolved from minor disputes over grazing rights into large-scale violent clashes with devastating humanitarian and economic consequences. Historically, interactions between farmers and herders in the state were largely cooperative, with herders grazing cattle on harvested farmlands in exchange for manure to improve soil fertility. However, from the early

2000s, increasing pressure on land due to population growth, agricultural expansion, and environmental changes led to frequent clashes (Ioryue, 2024). These tensions intensified significantly after the enactment of the 2017 Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in Benue State, which restricted open grazing and was met with strong resistance from pastoralist groups (Jaiyesimi, 2025).

The escalation has been marked by frequent violent attacks on farming communities. Incidents such as the 2016 Agatu massacre, the 2021 Odugbeho killings, and the 2025 Yelewata attacks are among the deadliest, leaving hundreds dead and thousands displaced (Agatu Conflict Report, 2016; Odugbeho Massacre Report, 2021). These attacks often involve armed herders invading villages, burning homes, and destroying crops, leading to the abandonment of farmlands and loss of stored harvests (Eze, 2021).

The pattern of violence typically follows a cycle of reprisal attacks, where disputes over grazing or crop destruction escalate into widespread killings and community displacement. The destruction of farmland and crops has severely reduced agricultural productivity, while displaced farming households now reside in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, further reducing food availability in the state (Ifedayo, 2023). As a result, Benue State has witnessed a steady decline in crop yields, livestock production, and market supply, thereby undermining its position as the “Food Basket of the Nation.”

Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflicts on Agricultural Productivity

Farmer-herder conflicts have had a profound negative impact on agricultural productivity in Benue State and across Nigeria. The persistent clashes have resulted in a significant decline in both crop and livestock production. Izirshar, Ogbe, and Lawal (2025) found that a 1% increase in insecurity leads to a 0.211% reduction in crop output and a 0.311% decline in livestock production in North-Central Nigeria, including Benue State. Eze (2021) similarly noted that recurring violent attacks on farming communities disrupt farming seasons, destroy farmlands, and lead to the loss of stored harvests, ultimately causing reduced yields of staple crops such as yam, maize, rice, and cassava.

The conflicts have also led to widespread abandonment of farmlands as farmers flee from unsafe areas. According to

Jaiyesimi (2025), many farming households have been displaced into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, making it impossible for them to cultivate their land. This has not only reduced the quantity of food produced but has also discouraged agricultural investments. Nnaji, Chukwu, and Odo (2019) observed that the perception of conflict risk reduces farmers’ willingness to invest in fertilizer use, improved seeds, and land expansion, further limiting agricultural productivity.

The cumulative effect is a severe disruption of agricultural value chains, resulting in decreased market supply and increased food prices. Musa and Ibrahim (2024) highlighted that the economic cost of violent conflicts on agriculture in North-Central Nigeria exceeds \$12 billion annually, reflecting the destruction of crops, livestock, and infrastructure. Consequently, the farmer-herder crisis has become a major threat to Benue State’s agricultural economy, undermining its role as Nigeria’s “Food Basket of the Nation.”

Effect of Farmer-herder Conflicts on Food Security

Farmer-herder conflicts have severely disrupted all four pillars of food security—availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability—in Benue State. The violent clashes have reduced food availability by causing widespread destruction of farmlands, loss of livestock, and abandonment of agricultural activities. Izirshar, Ogbe, and Lawal (2025) observed that insecurity in North-Central Nigeria significantly lowers both crop and livestock production, directly shrinking the volume of food produced in conflict-affected areas. Accessibility to food has also been constrained as displaced farmers lose their sources of income and face economic hardship, limiting their ability to purchase food (Eze, 2021).

The conflicts have negatively affected food utilization, as declining agricultural output reduces the diversity of diets available to households, leading to malnutrition, especially among children and vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the persistent nature of the clashes undermines food stability, as recurrent attacks prevent consistent farming activities, disrupt planting and harvesting cycles, and reduce food reserves (Jaiyesimi, 2025).

One of the most visible consequences has been rising food prices due to reduced production and disrupted market supply. Musa and Ibrahim (2024) reported that the economic

cost of violent conflicts on agriculture exceeds \$12 billion annually, reflecting massive losses in crops and livestock. As market disruptions persist, the risk of famine increases, particularly in rural communities highly dependent on farming for survival (Ifedayo, 2023). These developments threaten Benue State’s role as Nigeria’s “Food Basket of the Nation,” with severe implications for national food security and economic stability.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the effect of farmer-herder conflicts on food security in Benue State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a large population at a single point in time to describe the state of conflicts and their effects on agricultural productivity and food security. The area of the study was Benue State, which is largely agrarian and frequently affected by farmer-herder clashes. The population of the study consisted of 6,250 individuals, comprising farmers (4,000), herders (1,500), community leaders (500), and relevant government officials (250) across the conflict-prone Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Guma, Gwer West, Agatu, Logo, and Katsina-Ala.

A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, five LGAs were purposively selected due to their high incidence of farmer-herder conflicts. In the second stage, two

communities were randomly selected from each LGA. Finally, stratified random sampling was employed to select respondents from the identified groups in each community. Using Taro Yamane’s formula at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 375 respondents was determined. The distribution of the sample was 240 farmers, 90 herders, 30 community leaders, and 15 government officials. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into sections covering demographic information, causes and nature of conflicts, and their effects on agricultural productivity and food security. In addition, key informant interviews (KII) were conducted with traditional rulers, community leaders, and agricultural officers to obtain qualitative insights.

The instrument was validated by experts in agricultural economics and conflict management to ensure content and face validity. A pilot test was conducted in a neighboring state with similar characteristics to determine the reliability of the instrument, and the Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish internal consistency which 0.85 was obtained.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such mean, and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to complement the quantitative findings

Results

Research Question 1: What are the causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State?

Table 1: Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Benue State (N = 375)

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Remark
1	Competition over land for farming and grazing	4.52	0.71	Agreed
2	Destruction of crops by cattle	4.48	0.68	Agreed
3	Blockage of cattle routes by farmers	3.89	0.92	Agreed
4	Climate change leading to reduced grazing land	4.15	0.85	Agreed
5	Lack of government policies on grazing reserves	4.32	0.79	Agreed
6	Ethnic and religious differences between farmers and herders	3.76	1.02	Agreed
7	Proliferation of arms among herders	4.21	0.88	Agreed
8	Failure of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms	3.65	1.10	Agreed
9	Population pressure leading to land scarcity	4.07	0.94	Agreed
10	Government neglect in addressing farmer-herder disputes	4.30	0.82	Agreed

Table 1 showed that all the listed factors were identified as causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, as all mean scores were above 3.00. The most prominent causes were

competition over land for farming and grazing ($\bar{x}$ =4.52), destruction of crops by cattle ($\bar{x}$ =4.48), and lack of government policies on grazing reserves ($\bar{x}$ =4.32). Other

notable factors include government neglect, proliferation of arms among herders, climate change, and population pressure. The low standard deviations indicate strong agreement among respondents, suggesting that resource competition, weak policy frameworks, and ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms are the primary drivers of farmer-herder conflicts in the state.

Key informants stated that the primary causes of the conflicts include competition for land and water resources

due to population growth and agricultural expansion. They explained that *climate change has worsened grazing conditions in northern Nigeria, forcing herders to migrate southwards, which leads to frequent crop destruction*. Informants also emphasized that *poor implementation of grazing reserve policies, cattle rustling, and proliferation of arms among herders contribute to the violence*.

Research Question 2: What is the nature of the farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State?

Table 2: Nature of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Benue State (N = 375)

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Large-scale killings	4.50	0.73	Agreed
2	Mass displacement of farmers into IDP camps	4.46	0.70	Agreed
3	Destruction of farmlands and stored harvests	4.39	0.75	Agreed
4	Violent attacks on communities and burning of villages	4.28	0.79	Agreed
5	Loss of livelihood sources for farming households	4.22	0.82	Agreed

Table 2 showed that respondents agreed on all listed indicators as representing the nature of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, with all mean scores above 3.00. The most severe dimensions identified were large-scale killings, mass displacement, and destruction of farmlands and stored harvests. The low standard deviations indicate strong agreement among respondents, confirming that the conflicts are characterized by high levels of violence, displacement, and farmland destruction, which negatively affect livelihoods and agricultural productivity.

Informants described the conflicts as highly violent, involving large-scale killings, burning of villages, and destruction of farmlands. They highlighted that many farming communities have been displaced into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, leaving farmlands uncultivated. According to a community leader, *“entire villages have been wiped out in some areas, forcing thousands to flee, while the attackers destroy stored harvests and homes.”*

Research Question 3: How do farmer-herder conflicts affect agricultural productivity and market supply in Benue State?

Table 3: Effects of Farmer-Herder Conflicts on Agricultural Productivity and Market Supply (N = 375)

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Conflicts reduce farm yields due to destruction of crops	4.45	0.73	Agreed
2	Farmers abandon farmlands due to fear of attacks	4.33	0.81	Agreed
3	High cost of farm inputs due to insecurity	4.12	0.89	Agreed
4	Disruption of planting and harvesting seasons	4.25	0.85	Agreed
5	Shortage of food supply in local markets	4.18	0.92	Agreed
6	Increase in food prices due to reduced production	4.40	0.77	Agreed

7	Decline in income for farming households	4.30	0.83	Agreed
8	Reduction in labor availability due to displacement	3.92	1.05	Agreed
9	Disruption of transportation of farm produce to markets	3.87	1.10	Agreed
10	Loss of livestock due to retaliatory attacks	3.78	1.12	Agreed

Table 3 showed that respondents agreed that farmer-herder conflicts negatively affect agricultural productivity and market supply in Benue State, as all mean scores were above 3.00. The most severe effects were reduced farm yields due to crop destruction ($\bar{x}$ =4.45), increase in food prices ($\bar{x}$ =4.40), and abandonment of farmlands by farmers due to fear of attacks ($\bar{x}$ =4.33). Other notable effects include decline in farmers' income, disruption of planting and harvesting seasons, and shortage of food supply in markets. These findings indicate that the conflicts have led to reduced agricultural output, higher food prices, and disruption of market activities in the state.

Key informants agreed that agricultural productivity has drastically declined as farmers are afraid to return to their fields. Farmlands are abandoned, leading to reduced crop yields and livestock losses. One agricultural officer noted, *"farmers have missed several planting seasons, leading to scarcity of food in the markets."* Market supply chains have been disrupted, making it difficult to transport farm produce due to insecurity.

Research Question 4: What are the effects of farmer-herder conflicts on household food availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability in Benue State?

Table 3: Effects of Farmer-Herder Conflicts on Food Security (N = 375)

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Remark
1	Conflicts lead to food shortages in households	4.50	0.70	Agreed
2	Many families now skip meals due to high food prices	4.25	0.84	Agreed
3	Households rely on less nutritious food due to scarcity	4.10	0.91	Agreed
4	Conflicts reduce households' ability to store food	3.95	1.02	Agreed
5	Women and children are most affected by food insecurity	4.35	0.80	Agreed
6	Households now depend on food aid from NGOs/government	3.88	1.08	Agreed
7	Conflicts disrupt local food markets, making food inaccessible	4.20	0.87	Agreed
8	Many households have reduced food diversity	4.05	0.95	Agreed
9	Food instability leads to malnutrition in children	4.15	0.89	Agreed
10	Conflicts increase the vulnerability of female-headed households	4.30	0.82	Agreed

Table 4 showed that all mean scores were above 3.00, indicating agreement that farmer-herder conflicts negatively affect household food security in Benue State. The highest effects identified were food shortages in households ($\bar{x}$ 4.50), greater impact on women and children ($\bar{x}$ =4.35), and skipping meals due to high food prices ($\bar{x}$ =4.25). Other notable effects include disrupted local food markets ($\bar{x}$ =4.20), malnutrition in children ($\bar{x}$ 4.15), and reduced food diversity ($\bar{x}$ =4.05). The findings imply that farmer-herder conflicts reduce food availability and accessibility, limit

dietary diversity, and increase malnutrition, especially among women and children, thereby worsening household food insecurity in Benue State.

Informants reported that food availability has reduced drastically as production levels have fallen. Many households skip meals due to high food prices, while some depend on relief aid from NGOs and government agencies. Women and children are reported to be the most affected by food insecurity. According to a traditional ruler interviewed, *"families now rely on cheaper, less nutritious food, and*

malnutrition among children has become more common because farming is no longer safe.”

Discussion of Findings

1. Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Benue State

The study found that competition for land and water, crop destruction by cattle, and weak policy implementation are the primary causes of farmer-herder conflicts. These findings align with Ifedayo (2023), who emphasized that resource competition is the main driver of disputes in agrarian states. Musa and Ibrahim (2024) similarly reported that poor government intervention and ineffective grazing policies exacerbate conflicts. Mustafa and Sa’ad (2025) further linked climate change and environmental degradation to pastoral migration, increasing farmer-herder clashes.

2. Nature of the Farmer-herder Conflicts in Benue State

The conflicts in Benue State were found to be highly violent, involving mass killings, displacement, violent attacks on communities and destruction of farmlands. The Agatu Conflict Report (2016) documented large-scale killings and destruction of property, consistent with this study’s findings. Ifedayo (2023) reported that many farmers abandoned farmlands due to insecurity, resulting in reduced agricultural activities. Jaiyesimi (2025) also highlighted that thousands of people have been displaced into IDP camps, losing their livelihoods and homes.

3. Effects of Farmer-herder Conflicts on Agricultural Productivity and Market Supply

Farmer-herder conflicts were shown to reduce farm yields, cause farmland abandonment, and disrupt market supply. Izirshar, Ogbe, and Lawal (2025) found that rising insecurity correlates with significant declines in crop and livestock output. Nnaji, Chukwu, and Odo (2019) reported that insecurity discourages farmers from cultivating their lands, leading to reduced productivity. Musa and Ibrahim (2024) added that reduced agricultural production increases food prices and disrupts market systems in affected states.

4. Effects of Farmer-herder Conflicts on Food Security

The study revealed that conflicts lead to food shortages, reduced dietary diversity, and increased malnutrition, especially among women and children. Ifedayo (2023)

found that conflict-affected households experience severe food insecurity due to decreased agricultural production. Jaiyesimi (2025) noted that displaced households rely heavily on food aid as income and food availability decline. Nnaji, Chukwu, and Odo (2019) confirmed that insecurity has worsened hunger and malnutrition, with many families skipping meals due to high food prices.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of farmer-herder conflicts on food security in Benue State, Nigeria. Findings revealed that the major causes of the conflicts include competition over land and water resources, crop destruction, weak policy implementation, climate change, and population pressure. The conflicts were found to be highly violent, resulting in large-scale killings, mass displacement, destruction of farmlands, and loss of livelihoods. These events have significantly reduced agricultural productivity, as farmers abandon their farmlands and livestock losses increase, leading to reduced market supply and soaring food prices. Consequently, household food security has been severely affected, with reduced food availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability, forcing many families to skip meals, depend on less nutritious food, or rely on food aid.

Recommendations

- 1 The government should establish and enforce clear policies on grazing reserves, ranching, and farmland use to reduce competition over land and water resources between farmers and herders.
- 2 Traditional and community-based conflict resolution systems should be revitalized and supported, while dialogue platforms between farmers and herders should be promoted to foster peaceful coexistence.
- 3 Security agencies should be adequately deployed to protect farming communities, prevent armed attacks, and curb the proliferation of weapons among herders.
- 4 Government and NGOs should provide agricultural inputs, rehabilitation packages, and food assistance to farmers and internally displaced persons to restore livelihoods and improve food security in affected areas.

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