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# THE IMPACT OF OPEN GRAZING PROHIBITION AND RANCHES ESTABLISHMENT LAW OF BENUE STATE 2017 AND FARM OUTPUT FROM 2017-2023

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the impact of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) on farm output between 2017 and 2023 using a qualitative research design. Data were generated through documentary analysis and key informant interviews with farmers, herders, extension officers, local government officials, and community leaders, and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that while the law reduced farm invasions, enhanced farmers' confidence, and encouraged the cultivation of previously abandoned farmlands, its overall effectiveness was undermined by weak enforcement, inadequate stakeholder engagement, limited ranching infrastructure, and persistent farmer-herder tensions. The study further reveals that the absence of viable alternatives for pastoralists constrained livestock production and reinforced recurring conflicts, thereby limiting the law's contribution to agricultural productivity. It concludes that sustainable agricultural growth requires effective implementation, inclusive stakeholder participation, investment in ranching infrastructure, and conflict-sensitive policy approaches that address the livelihoods of both farmers and herders.

**Keywords:** Open Grazing; farm Output; Farmer-Herder Conflict; Ranching; Benue State.

## Introduction

Agriculture remains the backbone of Nigeria's rural economy, employing over one-third of the labour force and contributing significantly to national food security, employment, and economic development (World Bank, 2023; Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023). Within Nigeria, Benue State occupies a strategic position as one of the country's foremost agricultural regions, earning the designation *"Food Basket of the Nation"* due to its comparative advantage in the production of yam, rice, soybean, maize, cassava, and other staple crops (Benue State Government, 2017). Despite this agricultural potential, the state's productivity has been severely constrained by persistent farmer-herder conflicts arising from competition over land, water resources, and grazing routes.

Historically, pastoralism in Nigeria was sustained through seasonal transhumance, whereby Fulani pastoralists migrated southward during the dry season in search of pasture and water while returning northwards during the rainy season (Blench, 2010). This traditional grazing system remained relatively sustainable when land was abundant and population pressure was low. However, rapid population growth, climate change, desertification in northern Nigeria, expansion of cultivated farmlands, and increasing commercialization of agriculture have significantly reduced available grazing corridors, intensifying competition between sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists (International Crisis Group, 2018; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). The resulting conflicts have caused widespread destruction of lives, livelihoods, and agricultural assets, particularly in Benue State.

Between 2011 and 2017, Benue State experienced repeated violent confrontations that led to the destruction of thousands of hectares of farmland, displacement of rural communities, disruption of agricultural activities, and significant food production losses (International Crisis Group, 2018). These recurring conflicts prompted the Benue State Government to enact the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017, which prohibited open grazing and promoted ranching as a modern livestock management system intended to protect agricultural production, reduce violent conflicts, and improve security (Benue State Government, 2017). The legislation represented one of the earliest comprehensive legal frameworks in Nigeria designed to regulate livestock production through ranch development rather than unrestricted grazing.

The enactment of the law generated divergent reactions among policymakers, farming communities, livestock owners, and civil society organizations. Proponents argued that prohibiting open grazing would reduce crop destruction, enhance farmers' confidence, encourage agricultural investment, and stimulate food production. Conversely, critics contended that inadequate implementation mechanisms, insufficient ranching infrastructure, weak enforcement capacity, and the exclusion of key stakeholders undermined the effectiveness of the legislation and contributed to continued tensions (International Crisis Group, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018). Consequently, although the law has remained in force since 2017, scholarly debate continues regarding its actual contribution to agricultural productivity within Benue State.

Existing studies have predominantly examined the security, humanitarian, political, and legal dimensions of the farmer-herder conflict (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018). Comparatively fewer studies have qualitatively assessed the law's direct implications for agricultural output while integrating the perspectives of farmers, herders, extension officers, community leaders, and local administrators. This study addresses this gap by providing an empirical qualitative assessment of the extent to which the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law influenced agricultural production in Benue State between 2017 and 2023.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to policy and scholarship. Empirically, it provides evidence on the effectiveness of legislative intervention as an instrument for promoting agricultural productivity in conflict-prone rural communities.

Theoretically, it enriches literature on agricultural governance, conflict management, and rural political economy by demonstrating how legal reforms interact with socio-economic realities to shape agricultural outcomes. Practically, the findings will assist policymakers, agricultural development agencies, security institutions, traditional authorities, and development partners in designing more inclusive and sustainable strategies for addressing farmer-herder conflicts while improving agricultural productivity. Furthermore, the study contributes to ongoing national discourse on livestock transformation, food security, and sustainable rural development in Nigeria.

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) on agricultural output between 2017 and 2023.

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the extent to which the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law has influenced agricultural output in Benue State;
2. assess the effectiveness of the implementation and enforcement mechanisms of the law in promoting agricultural productivity;
3. examine the socio-economic effects of the law on farming and pastoral communities in Benue State; and
4. identify policy measures capable of enhancing the contribution of the law to sustainable agricultural development and peaceful farmer-herder relations.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

Open Grazing refers to the traditional livestock management system in which animals roam freely across communal or private lands in search of pasture and water without permanent confinement. Historically, it has been widely practiced in Nigeria and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa but has increasingly generated conflicts over land use due to population growth, agricultural expansion, and environmental pressures (Blench, 2010; FAO, 2019).

Open Grazing Prohibition denotes the legal restriction of unrestricted livestock movement through legislation that promotes controlled livestock management, particularly ranching. In Benue State, the *Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017)* was enacted to reduce farmer-herder conflicts, safeguard farmlands, and improve agricultural productivity through regulated livestock production (Benue State Government, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2018).

Ranching is a controlled livestock production system in which animals are raised within designated enclosures with adequate pasture, water, veterinary care, and other management inputs.

The Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) defines a ranch as "any enclosed or demarcated area of land on which any person carries out the business of rearing, breeding, feeding and grazing of livestock under control" (Benue State Government, 2017). This definition emphasizes a controlled livestock production system in which animals are confined within designated areas rather than allowed to graze freely. Ranching is widely regarded as a modern and sustainable livestock management practice that improves animal productivity, enhances disease control, reduces environmental degradation, and minimizes conflicts over land use between pastoralists and crop farmers (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2021; Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [FMARD], 2019). Within the context of this study, ranches refer to legally designated livestock production facilities established under the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) as an alternative to open grazing.

Farm Output refers to the total quantity or value of crops and livestock products produced by a farm or farming household within a specified period. It serves as an important indicator of agricultural performance, reflecting the effectiveness of resource utilization and

the impact of policies, security, and environmental conditions on farming activities (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

Farmer-Herder Conflict describes disputes between sedentary crop farmers and pastoral livestock herders over access to land, water, and grazing resources. These conflicts often result in loss of lives, destruction of farms, displacement of communities, and reduced agricultural activities, thereby posing significant challenges to food security and rural development (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2018).

For this study, these concepts are examined within the context of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) to assess how the regulation of livestock movement has influenced farm output between 2017 and 2023.

Benue State is located in North-Central Nigeria and is widely recognized as the nation's "Food Basket" because of its fertile agricultural land and high production of staple crops such as yam, cassava, rice, maize, soybean, and sorghum (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Agriculture constitutes the primary source of livelihood for the majority of its population and contributes significantly to the state's economy (Benue State Government, 2017). However, the state has experienced recurrent farmer-herder conflicts, which have disrupted farming activities, displaced rural communities, and threatened food security. Consequently, Benue State provides an appropriate context for examining the impact of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) on farm output.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Structural Functionalism Theory, which originated in the works of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and was subsequently developed by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Talcott Parsons (1951), Robert K. Merton (1975), George Peter Murdock (1949), and Bronisław Malinowski (1944). The theory conceives society as an integrated system of interrelated institutions and structures, each performing indispensable functions necessary for maintaining social order, stability, and equilibrium. It posits that social institutions such as: family, education, legal system, government and the economy operate interdependently, such that the effective functioning of one institution contributes to the stability of the entire social system (Parsons, 1951; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952).

According to Radcliffe-Brown (1952), the function of any social institution lies in its contribution to the maintenance and continuity of the social system. Merton (1975) further refined the theory by introducing the concepts of manifest functions, latent functions, and dysfunctions, arguing that while institutions are established to achieve intended objectives, they may also generate unintended consequences or fail to perform their expected roles effectively.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because it explains how legal institutions serve as mechanisms for regulating social relations and maintaining public order. Within every society, the legal, political, and economic systems are mutually dependent, and the effectiveness of one institution influences the performance of others. The enactment of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) represents an institutional response to the persistent farmer-herder conflicts that threatened social stability, agricultural production, and public security in the state. From a structural-functionalist perspective, the law was designed to restore social equilibrium by regulating livestock movement, protecting farmlands, safeguarding lives and property, promoting peaceful coexistence, and creating an enabling environment for improved farm output.

Furthermore, the establishment of ranches as an alternative to open grazing reflects what Merton (1975) describes as a “functional alternative” i.e. a new institutional arrangement introduced to replace an existing practice that had become dysfunctional. The law therefore seeks to restructure livestock production in a manner that enhances agricultural development while reducing conflict between farmers and pastoralists.

The application of Structural Functionalism to this study provides a useful framework for assessing whether the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law has effectively fulfilled its intended functions of reducing conflict, strengthening social order, and improving farm output in Benue State. Where these objectives are not fully achieved because of weak implementation, inadequate infrastructure, or stakeholder resistance, such outcomes constitute dysfunctions that undermine the law's capacity to maintain social stability and promote sustainable agricultural development.

**Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the impact of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) on farm output between 2017 and 2023. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the implementation and outcomes of the law.

The study was conducted in seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benue State i.e. Guma, Makurdi, Gwer West, Kwande, Logo, Katsina-Ala, and Agatu which have experienced recurrent farmer-herder conflicts. According to the National Population Commission (2006) official population figures, these LGAs have a combined population of approximately 1,376,134 people. They were purposively selected because they represent the most conflict-affected areas across the state's three senatorial districts.

The study employed purposive sampling to select information-rich participants with direct knowledge of the implementation of the law. A total of 28 key informants (four from each Local Government Area) were interviewed. The participants comprised crop farmers, community leaders, agricultural extension officers, traditional rulers, security personnel, and local government officials whose experiences provided diverse perspectives on the operation and effects of the law.

Data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) using a semi-structured interview guide. Documentary evidence, including the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017), government reports, policy documents, and relevant scholarly publications, was also reviewed to complement the interview data.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts were coded, categorized into emerging themes, and interpreted in relation to the study objectives. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed. These procedures improved the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation was sought through informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by removing identifying information from the interview transcripts, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, the findings are intended to provide analytical rather than statistical generalization. Consequently, the views expressed reflect the experiences of the selected key informants and should be interpreted within the context of the study area.

**Impact of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law on the Prevention of the Destruction of Crop Farms and Farm Output in Benue State (2017–2023)**

The first objective examined the extent to which the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017 has prevented the destruction of crop farms and enhanced farm output between 2017 and 2023. The findings indicate that the

enactment of the law represented a significant policy intervention aimed at safeguarding agricultural production in Benue State. Respondents Hon. Afred Emberga Honourable member representing Makurdi North State constituency in the Benue state House of Assembly acknowledged that before the enactment of the law, widespread destruction of yam, rice, cassava, maize, soybean, millet and other food crops by freely roaming cattle discouraged farming and reduced agricultural productivity, collaboratively, Agbo Abel from Agatu LGA an Agric Extension officer alludes that "the law during the first phase of the implememtation witnessed a reduction in herders inversion of farmland and clashes around Obarike Ito, Obagaji and Okokolo areas in Agatu". Following the implementation of the law, incidences of cattle invading farms reduced in communities where compliance was reasonably enforced, thereby encouraging some farmers to resume cultivation.

However, respondents unanimously maintained that although crop destruction reduced in some communities, the expected increase in farm output was not fully realized because persistent attacks did not stop in some parts of the state like: Guma,Makurdi and Gwer West Local Government Areas, displacement of farmers and weak implementation of the law continued to limit agricultural production. Thousands of farmers remained in internally displaced persons' camps in Daudu camp, Ugba camp, Abagena IDP camp and Aondana camp respectively could not cultivate their farms during successive farming seasons between 2017 and 2023. Consequently, a substantial proportion of fertile agricultural land remained uncultivated, resulting in lower agricultural output than expected.

These findings agrees with Tor, Age and Shaakaa (2024), who found that the implementation of the law had not satisfactorily achieved its objectives because even the state government on its part failed to establish pilot ranches to stimulates the process of compliance hence, compliance remained weak owing to administrative, political and socio-economic constraints. They also corroborate Kwaja and Adelehin (2018), who argued that legislation alone, cannot improve agricultural production without effective enforcement and adequate security.

From the perspective of Structural Functionalism Theory**,** agriculture constitutes one of the major institutions supporting economic stability and food security in Benue State. The open grazing prohibition and ranches establishment law 2017 was introduced as a regulatory institution to restore equilibrium within the agricultural system by protecting farmlands from destruction. Structural functionalists such as Parsons (1951) argue that when every institution performs its designated role effectively, society functions harmoniously. The findings reveal that weaknesses in security institutions, lack of pilot ranches, law enforcement agencies and local administrative structures reduced the capacity of the law to protect farms fully. Consequently, the dysfunction of these institutions prevented the law from producing the anticipated increase in farm output.

**Impact of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law on Farmers-Herders Conflict and Farm Output**

The second objective examined whether the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017 reduced farmers-herders conflict sufficiently to improve farm output between 2017 and 2023.

Findings revealed from selected farmers in Logo, Gwer West and Guma Local Govenment Areas consensually agreed that "although direct encounters between farmers and herders reduced in several communities following the introduction of ranching, violent attacks continued in many parts of Guma, Logo, Agatu, Kwande, Gwer West and Makurdi Local Government Areas". Hajia Haiwa in Okokolo village of Agatu observed that farmers abandoned their farms because of fear of attacks despite the existence of the law. As a result, farm sizes reduced considerably, while labour utilization, investment in agriculture and food production declined.

Nevertheless, some respondents: Zaki Akaave Kwaghtsume of Turan District in Kwande Local Government Area observed gradual improvements after the deployment of military operations such as Exercise Ayem Akpatuma, Operation Whirl Stroke and other security interventions, which complemented the implementation of the law. These interventions encouraged partial return to farming in relatively peaceful communities, although insecurity remained a significant obstacle to agricultural production.

The findings support previous studies which conclude that while the law has reduced some forms of conflict, it has not eliminated insecurity sufficiently to produce maximum agricultural output Aondohemba Maikyo in Guma stated.

According to Robert K. Merton (1975), peace and security constitute functional prerequisites for the operation of every productive institution within society. Agriculture cannot function efficiently where insecurity persists. The continued attacks indicate dysfunction within institutions responsible for maintaining social order, including security agencies, judicial institutions, local governments and traditional authorities. Consequently, although the anti-open grazing law established an institutional framework for peace, inadequate institutional coordination limited its contribution to increased farm output.

**Impact of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law on Environmental Protection and Agricultural Productivity Output.**

The third objective investigated whether the law contributed to environmental protection capable of sustaining agricultural productivity between 2017 and 2023.

The findings reveal that respondents perceived ranching as a more environmentally sustainable livestock production system than open grazing. Restricting livestock movement reduced indiscriminate grazing, overgrazing, destruction of vegetation, soil erosion and contamination of water sources in communities where compliance existed. Consequently, cultivated lands experienced relatively less degradation, thereby creating better environmental conditions for crop cultivation.

Despite these improvements, Tamenbee Iorwa of Raav, Gwer West argued that environmental benefits remained uneven because illegal grazing persisted in several rural communities of Raav, Mbakpa and Mbachohon owing to poor enforcement and continuing insecurity. In many conflict-prone areas for example Mbalagh ward of Makurdi Local Government Areas, environmental degradation continued as displaced populations abandoned farms while uncontrolled grazing occurred in inaccessible locations.

These findings support studies which argue that ranching promotes sustainable land management and protects agricultural land from ecological degradation.

Structural Functionalism explains environmental management as the collective responsibility of interconnected institutions such as environmental agencies, local governments, security institutions and traditional authorities. The findings demonstrate that where these institutions effectively performed their complementary roles, environmental conditions improved and agricultural productivity benefited. Conversely, institutional failure undermined the environmental objectives of the law and consequently affected farm output.

**Impact of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law on Creating a Conducive Environment for Increased Farm Output (2017–2023)**

The fourth objective examined whether the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law created an enabling environment for increased farm output in Benue State between 2017 and 2023.

The findings indicate that the law established an important legal framework for protecting agriculture and restoring confidence among farmers. Respondents acknowledged that where security improved, farmers cultivated larger portions of land, resulting in gradual improvements in crop production. Nevertheless, the majority Saasongu Mza, Kyado Mvendaga,lanshima Paul and Abah Daudu of varios local government areas maintained that

the anticipated increase in farm output was constrained by persistent insecurity, inadequate implementation of the law, displacement of rural populations and limited government support for agricultural production.

Evidence from recent studies indicates that insecurity significantly reduced crop and livestock output across affected local government areas, despite the existence of the anti-open grazing law.

These findings further support the conclusion that the objectives of the law have only been partially achieved because implementation challenges continue to undermine agricultural development.

Increased farm output depends upon the harmonious functioning of all social institutions involved in agricultural production. The legal system provides regulation, security agencies ensure safety, extension services support farmers, financial institutions provide credit, and government formulates agricultural policies. The study found that although the open grazing prohibition law strengthened the legal framework for agricultural production, deficiencies within complementary institutions weakened its overall contribution to farm output. Therefore, sustainable growth in agricultural production requires not only strict enforcement of the law but also effective institutional coordination capable of restoring normalcy within Benue State's agricultural system.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017 has produced measurable but uneven outcomes with respect to farm output in Benue State between 2017 and 2023. Although the legislation has contributed to reducing indiscriminate destruction of crop farms, promoting ranching as a more sustainable livestock management system, and reducing direct encounters between herders and farmers in some communities, these gains have not translated into commensurate improvements in farm output across the state. Persistent insecurity, inadequate enforcement of the law, institutional weaknesses, and the continued displacement of farming populations have collectively undermined the developmental objectives of the legislation. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of the law should not be assessed solely by its existence or legal provisions but by the capacity of the institutions responsible for its implementation to create conditions that enable sustained agricultural production.

The findings further reinforce the explanatory relevance of Structural Functionalism Theory. Parsons (1951) argued that society functions as an integrated system in which social order depends upon the effective performance of complementary institutions. The evidence generated in this study supports this proposition by demonstrating that the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law depends fundamentally on the coordinated functioning of security agencies, the judiciary, local government authorities, traditional institutions, agricultural extension services, environmental agencies, and community stakeholders. Where these institutions performed their complementary functions effectively, respondents reported improvements in farm security, reduced destruction of crops, better environmental management, and gradual increases in agricultural activities. Conversely, where institutional coordination remained weak, the objectives of the law were only partially realized despite its legal validity. The study therefore extends Structural Functionalism beyond its traditional application in explaining social order by demonstrating its utility in understanding the institutional conditions necessary for successful agricultural policy implementation in conflict-affected societies.

The findings also reveal an important dimension that has received limited attention in existing scholarship. Previous studies on the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law have largely evaluated the legislation from the perspectives of conflict management, human security, political contestation, and human rights (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2018). Consequently, relatively little

empirical attention has been devoted to examining how the implementation of the law has influenced farm outputs over time. By focusing specifically on farm output between 2017 and 2023, this study demonstrates that reductions in violent conflict alone cannot be regarded as sufficient indicators of policy success. Rather, the ultimate effectiveness of the legislation should be evaluated in terms of its ability to restore agricultural production, improve rural livelihoods, enhance food security, and stimulate sustainable economic development. This broader perspective contributes to ongoing debates on agricultural governance by shifting the focus from conflict containment to agricultural recovery and productivity.

The study further demonstrates that the relationship between anti-open grazing legislation and farm output is neither direct nor automatic. Instead, the relationship is mediated by institutional effectiveness, security conditions, stakeholder compliance, and complementary government interventions. This finding departs from the implicit assumption in some policy discussions that prohibiting open grazing would, by itself, restore agricultural productivity. The evidence generated from this study indicates that while the law established the legal foundation for agricultural recovery, its developmental outcomes depended on the effectiveness of accompanying institutions responsible for implementation, enforcement, rural security, environmental management, and agricultural support services. This institutional mediation provides a more comprehensive explanation of why improvements in farm output have remained slower than anticipated despite the enactment of the legislation.

The longitudinal nature of the study further strengthens this understanding. By examining developments over the seven-year implementation period from 2017 to 2023, the study captures both the immediate disruptions associated with the introduction of the law and the gradual institutional responses that followed. This temporal perspective demonstrates that policy outcomes evolve over time and are influenced by changing security dynamics, government responses, and stakeholder adaptation. Such evidence provides a more nuanced understanding of policy implementation than cross-sectional analyses, which often assess the effects of legislation at a single point in time.

Taken together, these findings suggest that improving agricultural farm output in Benue State requires more than the enactment of anti-open grazing legislation. Sustainable increases in farm output will depend upon strengthening institutional capacity, improving coordination among relevant government agencies, enhancing rural security, expanding agricultural extension services, supporting ranch development, facilitating the return and rehabilitation of displaced farming communities, and promoting continuous dialogue between farming and pastoralist groups. Without these complementary institutional reforms, the developmental objectives of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law are unlikely to be fully realized.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that broadens current understanding of the relationship between anti-open grazing legislation and agricultural development in Nigeria. It demonstrates that the effectiveness of such legislation is determined not only by its legal provisions but also by the extent to which the wider institutional environment functions cohesively to support implementation. By linking the objectives of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law directly with farm output through the analytical lens of Structural Functionalism Theory, the study contributes a more integrated framework for understanding agricultural policy implementation in conflict-prone environments. This perspective has important implications not only for Benue State but also for other sub-national governments in Nigeria and across Africa seeking to balance livestock production, agricultural development, environmental sustainability, and rural security within increasingly contested agrarian landscapes.

**Conclusion**

The enactment and implementation of the law has led to mass exodus of cattle from the state which brought relative peace in the state momentarily but in the long run it has

heightened insecurity in the state. The stiff opposition by *Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore* who has rejected the law as a threat to the livelihood to the Fulani people and this has prompted reprisal killings by the herdsmen. Consequently, there have been more deaths recorded in the state from attacks by herders with the implementation of the law. The study concludes that the implementation of the law has not had the desirable impact on agricultural production as statistics indicate that the conflict has severely affected agricultural livelihoods and optimal market functionality in the state, a development that has impacted negatively on food availability, food stability, food utilization and production. Currently, food accessibility has been badly been affected as prices of food items in the market have increased by 195% while 1,272,616 (17%) people are facing food and nutrition insecurity in the state (FAO, 2024) in the state. This study examined Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017 and farm output in Benue State and based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

Benue State government should create pilot ranches as it was done in the 70s under the leadership of Governor Aper Aku in Benue state and subsequently create a ranches establishment scheme facilitated by an agency of government under the supervision of the ministry of agriculture so that private investors desirous of establishing ranches can be regulated as it done in other developed countries.

The study recommends that the government should make efforts to address the conflict through establishment of ranches and agro-rangers. The primary reason for the conflict is destruction of crops by the wandering animals since there is no specific place for them to stay. Thus, the Benue State government should collaborate with the different community leaders and chiefs, to give a good portion of land to migrating herdsmen as grazing land.

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**Appendix I**
**Particulars of interviewees**

| S/N | Name | Sex | Age | Occupation | Date of Interview | Place of Interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Charles Aondohembe Maikyo | Male | 45 | Information Officer | 18th July 2024 | Guma |
| 2 | Alfred Emberga | Male | 42 | Legislator | 18th July 2024 | Makurdi |
| 3 | Zamber Pinechia | Male | 45 | Farmer | 18th July 2024 | Guma |
| 4 | Yogbo Terfa | Male | 41 | Farmer | 18th July 2024 | Guma |
| 5 | James Kula | Male | 38 | Farmer | 23th July, 2024 | Logo |
| 6 | Joy Ukange | Female | 35 | Farmer | 23th July, 2024 | Logo |
| 7 | Shimadoo Aligba | Female | 34 | Farmer | 23th July, 2024 | K/Ala |
| 8 | Ahua Atser | Male | 52 | Farmer | 23th July, 2024 | K/Ala |
| 9 | Haiwa Adamu Ali | Male | 45 | Businesswoman | 12th July, 2024 | Agatu |
| 10 | Adanu Isaiah | Male | 29 | Farmer | 12th July, 2024 | Agatu |
| 11 | Terver Abua | Male | 47 | Farmer | 8thSeptember, 2024 | Gwer-West |
| 12 | Chia Erdoo | Female | | Farmer | 8th, September 2024 | Gwer-West |
| 13 | Manger Bem | Male | 48 | Farmer | 7th September, 2024 | Kwande |
| 14 | Aondoakula Simon | Male | 34 | Farmer | 7th September, 2024 | Kwande |
| 15 | Agbo Abel | Male | 50 | Civil servant | 22nd July, 2026 | Agatu |
| 16 | Zaki Akaave Kwaghtsume | Male | 65 | Chief | 22nd July, 2026 | Kwande |
| 17 | Tamenbee Iorwa | Male | 45 | Civil servant | 23rd July, 2026 | Gwer West |
| 18 | Terna Mbapuun | Male | 28 | Farmer | 22nd, July, 2026 | Katsina Ala |
| 19 | Leonad Vaakaa | Male | 45 | IDP | 23rd July, 2026 | Makurdi |
| 20 | Adinya Tar | Male | 40 | IDP | 23rd July, 2026 | Makurdi |
| 21 | Mbazendan iorwa | Female | 43 | IDP | 23rd July, 2026 | Makurdi |
| 22 | Saasongu Mza | Male | 70 | IDP | 22nd July, 2026 | Guma |
| 23 | Zenda Uwua | Male | 43 | Farmer | 24th July, 2026 | Gwer West |
| 24 | Upuu Sarwuan | Male | 50 | Civil servant | 22nd July, 2026 | Kwande |
| 25 | Kyado Mvendaga | Female | 49 | Farmer | 22nd July, 2026 | Katsina Ala |
| 26 | Lanshima Paul | Male | 37 | Farmer | 23rd July, 2026 | Logo |
| 27 | Iorngulum zendesha | Male | 35 | Farmer | 23rd July, 2026 | Logo |
| 28 | Abah Daudu | Male | 36 | Farmer | 21st July, 2026 | Agatu |