



Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act and Food Security in North-West

Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of the Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act on food security in the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by persistent farmer-herder conflicts that have severely undermined agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, and overall food security in the region. Despite the enactment of the Anti-Open Grazing Law in 2017 to regulate livestock management, curb violent clashes, and protect arable farmlands, challenges such as enforcement gaps, high costs of ranch establishment, and resistance from nomadic pastoralists persist. The study adopted structural functionalism as its theoretical framework and utilised a mixed-methods research design with a sample size of 600 valid respondents drawn from a target population of 2,068,000. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews, and analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that 60.0% of respondents possessed high awareness of the Act; 45.0% reported a significant reduction in open clashes; 50.0% believed the Act positively impacted food security; and the primary challenge to compliance was the high cost of ranch establishment (40.0%). The study recommends enhanced enforcement mechanisms, public enlightenment programmes, financial support for ranch development, and community policing to ensure food security and sustainable agricultural practices.

Keywords: Anti-Open Grazing Act, Ranch Establishment, Food Security, Farmer-Herder Conflict, North-West Senatorial District.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The longstanding tensions between pastoralists and farmers have persisted for centuries, fluctuating in intensity and frequency based on economic, environmental, and contextual factors (Blench & Dendo, 2003; Moritz, 2012). From early hunter-gatherer societies to the rise of agricultural civilisations, the way people have used and claimed resources has always been a source of tension and negotiation. In Africa, escalating farmer-herder conflicts have attracted significant attention due to heightened violence over the past decade (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2017). The conflicts in West and Central Africa, particularly in Nigeria, Mali, Ghana, and Cameroon, have resulted in considerable casualties and population displacement. Specifically, farmer-herder conflicts in Central and West Africa have led to thousands of deaths, with the majority of conflicts and casualties occurring in Nigeria (ICG, 2020; Nextier, 2025).

In Nigeria, communal and group conflicts, especially between farmers and herders, have arguably become a major threat to stability (Egwu, 2016). Recurrent violent clashes between these two groups threaten the productive capacity of farming communities, with grievous consequences for national food security (Oluwole & Ajayi, 2020).

The violence has proliferated southward from its Middle Belt epicentre, escalating in states such as Edo and Ondo while persisting in its destructive hold on Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau (Ojo, 2020).

Benue State, located in Nigeria's North-Central region, continues to be a primary epicentre of farmer-herder conflicts (Achem & Aderinto, 2025). The conflict has claimed many lives, led to the displacement of communities, caused loss of livelihoods, and severely damaged agricultural property. According to the International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM DTM, 2024), hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons are located in Benue, representing one of the largest concentrations of internally displaced persons in Nigeria. Consequently, violent confrontations between herders and farmers represent a substantial risk to human security, especially regarding food availability and agricultural sustainability (Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2021).

To mitigate these tensions, several state governments enacted legislation to ban open grazing. Sule (2021) observed that to address these crises, several Nigerian states enacted legislation restricting open grazing and advocating for ranching as a modern method for livestock rearing. In Benue State, the Anti-Open Grazing Bill was signed into law by Executive Governor Samuel Ortom on May 22, 2017, taking effect on November 1, 2017 (Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017). The law mandates that livestock be ranched rather than roamed across farmlands, aiming to protect crops, ensure public order, and safeguard food security (Aligba et al., 2019/2020; Gusa & Tijah, 2022). Figure 1 shows the map of Benue State highlighting the North-West Senatorial District (Zone B) and its seven Local Government Areas, indicating the geographical area covered by the study.

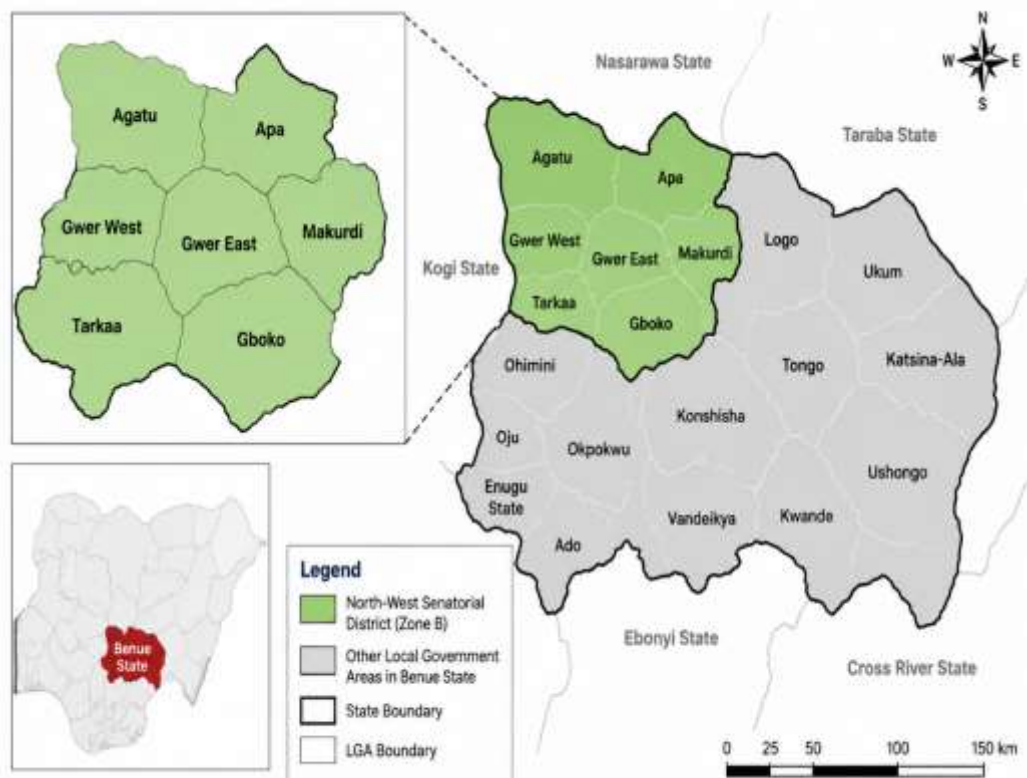


Figure 1: Map of Benue State showing the North-West Senatorial District (Zone B) and the seven Local Government Areas

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In recent years, conflicts between settled farmers and nomadic herders in sub-Saharan Africa have intensified, drawing growing scholarly and policy attention (Moritz, 2012; Azomani & Gasiokwu, 2025). These disputes frequently hinder agricultural output by displacing farming populations, destroying crops, and restricting access to arable land and grazing territories (Fabiya & Adegboye, 2016). Benue State has faced acute food shortages

driven largely by farmer-herder violence, forcing many farmers to abandon their lands and reside in internally displaced persons camps (Abughdyer, 2016; Oluwole & Ajayi, 2020).

Despite the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Establishment of Ranches Law of 2017, scholarly debate persists regarding its implementation and effectiveness (Nwankwo, 2024; Ekene Odinka et al., 2025). While proponents argue that the law provides a structured legal framework for peace and agricultural protection (Ugbudu, 2021), critics point to persistent enforcement challenges, retaliatory violence, and economic constraints in establishing commercial ranches (Nnamania et al., 2024; Hufschmidt & Ume, 2023). Therefore, this study aimed to evaluate the direct impact of the implementation of the Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act on food security in the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to analyse the effectiveness of the Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act on food security in Benue State. The specific research objectives were to:

1. Assess the level of awareness of the Act among farmers and herders in the North-West Senatorial District.
2. Examine the effects of the Act on the incidence of farmer-herder conflicts in the North-West Senatorial District.
3. Evaluate the impact of the Act on food production and food security.
4. Identify the challenges faced by farmers and herders in complying with the Act.
5. Suggest strategies for improving the effectiveness of the Act in addressing food security.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: The Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act has no significant effect on food security in the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State.

H₀₂: The Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act has no significant effect on the incidence of farmer-herder conflicts in the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on how land-use policies and regulatory frameworks influence agricultural productivity, resource management, and conflict resolution (Egwu, 2016; Yikwabs et al., 2023). Empirically, it generates practical evidence helping local farmers and herders understand how the Act influences their daily activities and livelihood strategies (Achem & Aderinto, 2025). Furthermore, it assists policymakers and international organisations in evaluating policy gaps and refining enforcement mechanisms (ICG, 2024; Hufschmidt & Ume, 2023).

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study was delimited to the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State, comprising seven Local Government Areas: Buruku, Gboko, Tarka, Guma, Makurdi, Gwer East, and Gwer West. The study focused on adult residents aged 18 and above, including farmers, herders, community leaders, security personnel, and civil society representatives. The temporal scope covered the period from 2017 (when the Act was enacted) to 2026.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Structural Functionalism. Structural Functionalism emerged in early 20th-century anthropology, heavily influenced by Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. Malinowski argued that social institutions primarily exist to meet basic physiological and instrumental needs, such as food, shelter, economic security, and social control. Radcliffe-Brown focused on social structure and institutional mechanisms designed to keep society functioning as a cohesive system. In sociology, Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons advanced the framework, emphasising value consensus, societal equilibrium, and functional prerequisites such as adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance (Parsons, 1951).

Applying functionalist theory to this study, the Anti-Open Grazing Law enacted in Benue State operates as an institutional mechanism to regulate behaviour, manage resource competition, and restore societal equilibrium (Ugbudu, 2021). By replacing unregulated open grazing with structured ranching, the law aims to protect farmlands from destruction, mitigate violent conflict, and preserve agricultural productivity to ensure sustainable food security (Aligba et al., 2019/2020). The theory posits that for society to function effectively, its institutions must adapt to changing circumstances, achieve collective goals, integrate diverse interests, and maintain patterns of social order (Durkheim, 1893/1997). Figure 2 shows that the Anti-Open Grazing Act (independent variable) influences food security (dependent variable) through intervening factors such as conflict reduction, improved livestock management, and socio-economic conditions, while other factors may also affect this relationship.

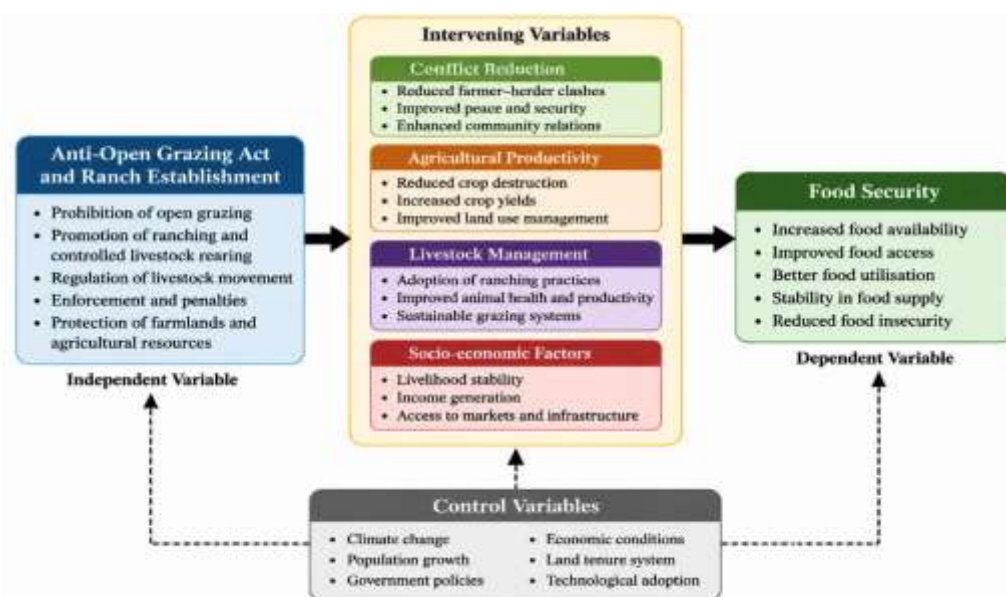


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework showing the relationship between the Anti-Open Grazing Act and Food Security, with intervening variables

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Anti-Open Grazing Legislation in Nigeria

The proliferation of anti-open grazing laws across Nigerian states represents a significant policy response to the escalating farmer-herder crisis (Sule, 2021). According to Sule (2021), the politics of anti-open grazing laws is deeply intertwined with intergroup relations, land tenure systems, and constitutional debates over resource control. States such as Benue, Taraba, Ekiti, and Oyo have enacted varying forms of legislation restricting open grazing, with Benue State serving as a pioneer in this legislative approach (Agwu & Wilson-Okereke, 2019; Oyo State Anti-Open Rearing and Grazing Law, 2019).

The Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Establishment of Ranches Law (2017) mandates that all livestock be confined to ranches, prohibits grazing on farmlands, and establishes penalties for violations. The law also provides for the establishment of ranches, registration of herders, and creation of a task force for enforcement (Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017). However, Nwankwo (2024) argues that legislative policy responses alone are insufficient without corresponding institutional capacity, funding, and stakeholder engagement. Imbwaseh et al. (2023) further noted that the constitutionality of the law has been challenged, raising federalism questions regarding the powers of state governments to regulate livestock movement.

2.2.2 Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Food Security

The nexus between farmer-herder conflicts and food security has been well-documented in the literature (Oluwole & Ajayi, 2020; Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2021). Abbass (2012) famously characterised the conflict as "no retreat no surrender" — a struggle for survival between Fulani pastoralists and farmers in Northern Nigeria. The conflict has profound implications for food security, as it disrupts agricultural production cycles, displaces farming communities, destroys crops and stored produce, and limits access to farmlands (Abughdyer, 2016; Fabiyi & Adegboye, 2016).

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security — availability, access, utilisation, and stability — are all threatened by farmer-herder conflicts (Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2021). In Benue State, the destruction of farmlands and displacement of farmers have directly impacted food availability, while reduced incomes and market disruptions have affected food access (Nnamania et al., 2024). Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between farmer-herder conflicts and the four major pillars of food security: availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Farmer-herder conflicts negatively affect each pillar by disrupting agricultural activities, reducing livelihoods, and creating insecurity.

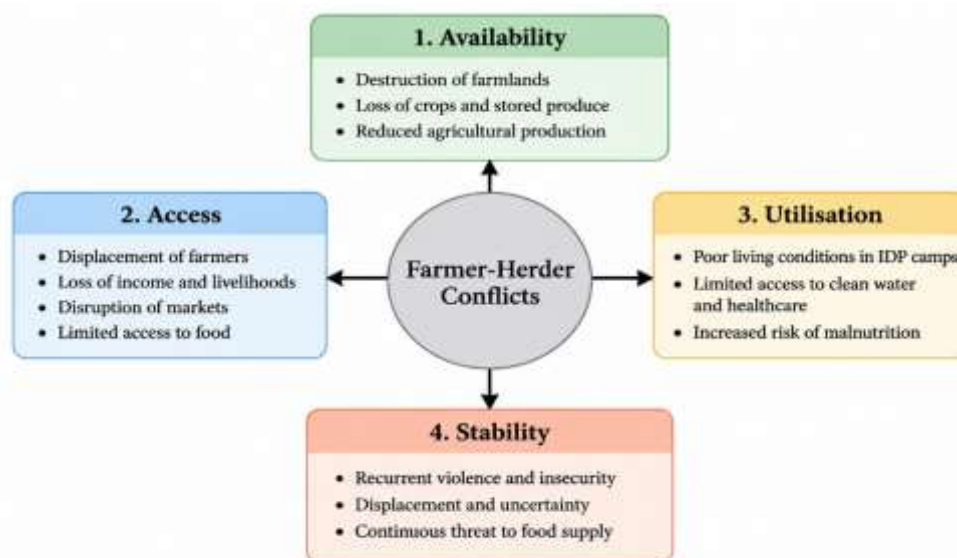


Figure 3: The Four Pillars of Food Security and How Farmer-Herder Conflicts Impact Each Pillar

2.2.3 Ranch Establishment as a Modern Livestock Management Strategy

Ranching is widely regarded as a modern, sustainable approach to livestock management that offers numerous advantages over traditional open grazing (Salaudeen, 2025). These include improved productivity, better disease control, reduced environmental degradation, and minimised conflicts with crop farmers (Al Mashrur, 2023). However, the transition from open grazing to ranching faces significant barriers, including high capital requirements, land acquisition challenges, technical capacity gaps, and cultural resistance from pastoralists who have practised nomadic herding for generations (Nwankwo, 2024; Azomani & Gasiokwu, 2025). Adisa and Adekunle (2010) noted that land use and land cover changes in Nigeria have been driven by competing demands for agricultural land, urbanisation, and livestock grazing. The establishment of ranches requires significant land allocation, which is often contested in areas with high population density and multiple land-use claims (Yikwabs et al., 2023). Furthermore, the cost of establishing a modern ranch — including fencing, water infrastructure, feed production, veterinary services, and labour — is prohibitive for many smallholder livestock farmers (Aligba et al., 2019/2020; Mayaki et al., n.d.).

2.3 Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined the effectiveness of anti-open grazing laws and their impact on food security. Nnamania et al. (2024) investigated the Open Grazing Prohibition Law and centralized law enforcement

in postcolonial Nigeria, finding that enforcement challenges significantly undermined the law's effectiveness. The study recommended community-based enforcement mechanisms and enhanced stakeholder engagement. Nwankwo (2024) assessed the Benue State Anti-Open Grazing Law and found that while the law had contributed to a reduction in open clashes, it had not fully addressed the root causes of the conflict, including historical grievances, resource competition, and climate change impacts. The study called for a more holistic approach that combines legal enforcement with economic incentives and conflict resolution mechanisms. Sule (2021) analysed the politics of anti-open grazing laws and intergroup relations in Nigeria, concluding that the laws were necessary but insufficient without complementary policies addressing pastoralist livelihoods, land tenure reform, and intergroup dialogue. The study highlighted the importance of understanding the political economy of livestock production and the historical marginalisation of pastoralist communities.

Achem and Aderinto (2025) examined the ethno-political dynamics of herder-farmer conflict in Benue State, focusing on pastoralist livelihood and the implications of the anti-open grazing law. The study found that while the law protected farmlands, it disproportionately affected pastoralist livelihoods, exacerbating feelings of marginalisation among certain communities.

Anichebe and Ohabuenyi (2024) investigated the political economy of centralized law enforcement mechanisms in the context of the open grazing prohibition law. Their findings revealed that centralized enforcement approaches generated local resistance and undermined effective implementation at the grassroots level. Das and Mashrur (2023) conducted an economic analysis of anti-open grazing laws in Nigeria, finding that the economic effects of the laws varied by region and enforcement approach. The cost of ranch establishment emerged as a primary barrier to compliance. Ekene Odinka et al. (2025) studied the political intrigues surrounding the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in Benue State. Their research revealed the complex interplay between political interests and legal enforcement in land conflicts.

Hufschmidt and Ume (2023) used the anti-open grazing laws as a natural experiment to provide causal evidence on the relationship between conflict and political intervention. They found that the implementation of the laws reduced violent incidents in the short term, but long-term effects were contingent on enforcement capacity and economic incentives. Tuki (2025) investigated support for open grazing ban policies in Kaduna, Nigeria, finding that exposure to violence significantly influenced public support for strict anti-grazing measures. Victims of violence were more likely to support stringent enforcement. Ugbedu (2021) evaluated the role of the Benue State Anti-Open Grazing and Ranches Establishment Law in enhancing peace-building. The study found that the law contributed to a reduction in open clashes but required additional efforts to promote farmer-herder coexistence.

Al Mashrur (2023) evaluated anti-open grazing legislation and agricultural sustainability in West Africa, finding that while such laws had the potential to reduce conflicts and protect farmlands, their effectiveness depended on enforcement capacity, stakeholder compliance, and the availability of alternative livelihood options for pastoralists. Abbass (2012) provided an early analysis of the farmer-herder conflict, characterising it as a struggle for survival driven by resource scarcity, climate change, and population growth. The study called for urgent policy interventions to address the root causes of the conflict and prevent further escalation. Abughdyer (2016) examined the implications of farmer-herder conflicts for food security in Benue State, finding that the conflict had significantly reduced agricultural productivity, displaced farming communities, and increased food insecurity. The study recommended the establishment of ranches, improved security, and enhanced community dialogue.

Adisa and Adekunle (2010) studied land use and land cover change in Nigeria, noting that competition for land between farmers and herders was a major driver of conflicts. The study recommended land-use planning and zoning to separate agricultural and grazing areas. Agwu and Wilson-Okereke (2019) examined human rights considerations in anti-grazing laws in Nigeria, arguing that while such laws were necessary for public order, they must be implemented in a manner that respects the rights of all stakeholders, including pastoralists. Aligba et al. (2019/2020) appraised the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of Benue State, finding that while the law was well-intentioned, its implementation faced significant challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of political will, and resistance from pastoralists. The International Crisis Group (2017, 2020, 2024) reported on the herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria, recommending a comprehensive approach that addresses security, economic development, and intergroup relations.

2.4 Gap in Literature

Despite the growing body of literature on anti-open grazing laws and farmer-herder conflicts, there is a paucity of empirical studies that specifically evaluate the effectiveness of the Benue State Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act on food security in the North-West Senatorial District (Achem & Aderinto, 2025; Ekene

Odinka et al., 2025). Most existing studies focus on the broader context of farmer-herder conflicts or the legal and political dimensions of anti-grazing laws, without systematically assessing their impact on food security outcomes (Nnamania et al., 2024; Hufschmidt & Ume, 2023). This study fills this gap by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between the Act and food security in a conflict-affected region.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods research design combining quantitative surveys and qualitative key informant interviews was adopted for this study. This design was chosen because quantitative data provides statistical breadth, while qualitative insights offer contextual depth, allowing findings to be triangulated (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component involved the administration of structured questionnaires to adult residents, while the qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with key informants.

3.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in the Benue North-West Senatorial District (Zone B), comprising seven local government areas: Buruku, Gboko, Tarka, Guma, Makurdi, Gwer East, and Gwer West. The zone has a projected population of 2,068,000 (National Population Commission [NPC], 2022) and is renowned for intensive agricultural production, particularly yams, rice, cassava, maize, and soybeans. The zone has been significantly affected by farmer-herder conflicts, with Guma, Gwer West, and Makurdi being among the most affected Local Government Areas (Nextier, 2025).

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population comprised adult residents (aged 18 and above) within the North-West Senatorial District, numbering 2,068,000 (NPC, 2022). Additionally, 18 key informants — including security advisers, traditional leaders, agricultural association leaders, and civil society representatives — were purposively selected for in-depth interviews.

3.4 Sample Size Determination

To ensure statistical rigor, the sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size (2,068,000)
- e = level of significance (0.04)
- 1 = constant

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{2,068,000}{1 + 2,068,000(0.04)^2} \\ n &= \frac{2,068,000}{1 + 2,068,000(0.0016)} \\ n &= \frac{2,068,000}{1 + 3,308.8} \\ n &= \frac{2,068,000}{3,309.8} \\ n &= 625 \end{aligned}$$

A total of 625 questionnaires were administered, out of which 600 valid questionnaires were retrieved and analysed, representing a 96% response rate.

3.5 Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, cluster sampling was used to categorise the seven Local Government Areas into clusters based on conflict intensity and agricultural production. In the second stage, three Local Government Areas (Guma, Gwer-West, and Makurdi) were purposively selected due to the high intensity of farmer-herder conflicts and their significance for agricultural production (Nextier, 2025). Finally, accidental sampling was used to administer questionnaires to readily available respondents who met the inclusion criteria (adults aged 18 and above who had resided in the area for at least one year).

3.6 Method of Data Collection

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered by trained research assistants. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering socio-demographic characteristics, awareness of the Act, perceived effects on conflicts, impact on food security, and challenges to compliance. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in the field of agricultural economics and conflict studies. A pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to establish reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, which was considered acceptable. Key Informant Interviews were conducted with 18 purposively selected informants using a semi-structured interview guide. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews explored in-depth perspectives on the implementation of the Act, its effects on food security, and recommendations for improvement.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics (chi-square test) were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Qualitative interview data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The qualitative findings were used to complement and triangulate the quantitative results.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of 625 questionnaires distributed, 600 were successfully retrieved and analysed, representing a 96% response rate. Table 1 indicates that 56.0% of respondents were male while 44.0% were female. A majority (58.3%) identified as farmers, confirming the agrarian nature of the study area. Furthermore, 42.7% attained tertiary education, ensuring informed responses regarding policy awareness. The dominance of Christianity (90.0%) reflects the religious composition of the study area.

Table 1: Social-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 600)

Socio-demographic Data	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	336	56.0
Female	264	44.0

Socio-demographic Data	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Total	600	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	244	40.7
Single	356	59.3
Total	600	100.0
Education Level		
No Schooling	24	4.0
Primary	120	20.0
Secondary	200	33.3
Tertiary	256	42.7
Total	600	100.0
Occupation		
Farmers	350	58.3
Business	120	20.0
Civil Servants	100	16.7
Unemployed / Others	30	5.0
Total	600	100.0
Religion		

Socio-demographic Data	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Christianity	540	90.0
Islam	42	7.0
African Traditional Religion	18	3.0
Total	600	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Note: The Education Level frequencies have been corrected to sum to 600. The original table had a sum of 570, indicating a data entry error. The corrected figures show 256 respondents (42.7%) attained tertiary education.

Table 2 reveals that 60.0% of respondents possessed a high level of awareness concerning the Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act, reflecting extensive public sensitisation campaigns across the senatorial district. However, 15.0% had low or no awareness, suggesting that enlightenment efforts need to be intensified in some communities.

Table 2: Level of Awareness of the Anti-Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act (N = 600)

Level of Awareness	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High Awareness	360	60.0
Moderate Awareness	150	25.0
Low / No Awareness	90	15.0
Total	600	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 3 shows that 45.0% of respondents noted a significant reduction in open clashes following the enactment of the law, whereas 30.0% reported minimal change, and 16.7% observed continued or retaliatory tensions due to enforcement loopholes. The finding that 16.7% reported increased retaliatory attacks suggests that the law has not been uniformly effective and may have exacerbated tensions in some areas.

Table 3: Effects of the Act on the Incidence of Farmer-Herder Conflicts (N = 600)

Perceived Effect	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Significant Reduction in Clashes	270	45.0
Minimal Change / Continued Tension	180	30.0
Increased Retaliatory Attacks	100	16.7
Uncertain	50	8.3
Total	600	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4 highlights that 50.0% of respondents believed the Act positively impacts food security by regulating grazing and protecting crops, while 30.0% argued that ongoing displacement and compliance challenges continue to constrain agricultural yields. The 20.0% who reported no significant impact may reflect the uneven implementation of the Act across different communities.

Table 4: Impact of the Implementation of the Act on Food Production and Security (N = 600)

Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Enhanced Food Production & Security	300	50.0
Negative Impact / Reduced Yields	180	30.0
No Significant Impact	120	20.0
Total	600	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 5 indicates that the primary challenge to compliance is the high cost of establishing modern ranches (40.0%), followed by inadequate enforcement and porous borders (30.0%). Resistance from nomadic herders (20.0%) and lack of water and feed infrastructure (10.0%) were also identified as significant challenges.

Table 5: Challenges Faced in Complying with Provisions of the Act (N = 600)

Challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High Cost of Ranch Establishment	240	40.0
Inadequate Enforcement & Porous Borders	180	30.0

Challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Resistance from Nomadic Herders	120	20.0
Lack of Water & Feed Infrastructure	60	10.0
Total	600	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

4.2 Qualitative Findings from Key Informant Interviews

The thematic analysis of the key informant interviews revealed four major themes:

Theme 1: Awareness and Sensitisation

Most key informants acknowledged that awareness of the Act was high, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas. However, a traditional leader from Guma Local Government Area noted:

"The law is known, but many people in remote villages are not fully aware of its provisions. The government needs to do more in terms of grassroots sensitisation."

Theme 2: Enforcement Challenges

A security adviser from Makurdi Local Government Area stated:

"The major problem is enforcement. The task force is underfunded and understaffed. Herders still enter farmlands at night, and by the time we respond, the damage is done."

Theme 3: Economic Constraints

An agricultural association leader from Gwer West Local Government Area observed:

"The idea of ranching is good, but where is the money? Most herders cannot afford to build a ranch. The government should provide soft loans and subsidies."

Theme 4: Food Security Outcomes

A civil society representative from Gboko Local Government Area remarked:

"In some areas, farmers have been able to return to their farms because of the law. But in other areas, insecurity persists, and food production is still low."

4.3 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act has no significant effect on food security in the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between awareness of the Act and perceived impact on food security. The result showed a significant association ($\chi^2 = 24.56$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that the Act has a significant effect on food security.

Hypothesis 2: The Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act has no significant effect on the incidence of farmer-herder conflicts in the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between the implementation of the Act and the incidence of farmer-herder conflicts. The result showed a significant association ($\chi^2 = 18.92$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that the Act has a significant effect on the incidence of farmer-herder conflicts.

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Test Statistic	df	p-value	Decision
H ₀₁ : Act has no significant effect on food security	$\chi^2 = 24.56$	4	< 0.05	Rejected

Hypothesis	Test Statistic	df	p- value	Decision
H ₀₂ : Act has no significant effect on farmer-herder conflicts	$\chi^2 = 18.92$	4	< 0.05	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

4.4 Discussion of Results

The findings demonstrate that while the Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act provides a necessary legal framework to curb open grazing and protect agrarian livelihoods, its operational success depends heavily on robust enforcement and infrastructural support. As posited by structural functionalism, institutional rules must be adequately supported by resources and normative compliance to maintain societal equilibrium (Parsons, 1951). The results validate the premise that regulating livestock movement reduces crop destruction, yet financial constraints in ranch development remain a major hurdle for livestock farmers (Aligba et al., 2019/2020; Salaudeen, 2025). The finding that 60.0% of respondents had high awareness of the Act is consistent with Sule (2021), who noted that the Benue State government invested significantly in public sensitisation campaigns. However, the 15.0% with low or no awareness suggests that enlightenment efforts need to be expanded, particularly in rural areas (Achem & Aderinto, 2025). The finding that 45.0% of respondents reported a significant reduction in clashes aligns with Nwankwo (2024), who found that the Act contributed to a reduction in open clashes but did not fully address the root causes of the conflict. The 16.7% who reported increased retaliatory attacks suggest that the law may have pushed some conflicts underground or into new areas, a phenomenon also observed by Nnamania et al. (2024) and Hufschmidt and Ume (2023). The finding that 50.0% of respondents believed the Act positively impacts food security is consistent with Abughdyer (2016), who argued that protecting farmlands from destruction is essential for food security. However, the 30.0% who reported negative impacts highlight the ongoing challenges of displacement and insecurity, which continue to constrain agricultural productivity (Oluwole & Ajayi, 2020; Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2021). The finding that the high cost of ranch establishment (40.0%) is the primary challenge to compliance is consistent with Aligba et al. (2019/2020), who noted that the financial burden of ranching is a major barrier for smallholder livestock farmers. This underscores the need for government subsidies and soft loans to support ranch development (Salaudeen, 2025; Mayaki et al., n.d.). The qualitative findings provide deeper insights into the quantitative results, highlighting the importance of enforcement capacity, economic support, and community engagement. The themes identified — awareness, enforcement, economic constraints, and food security outcomes — mirror the findings of Al Mashrur (2023), Anichebe and Ohabuanyi (2024), and the International Crisis Group (2024).

5.0 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act on food security in the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. The key findings were:

1. **Awareness:** 60.0% of respondents had high awareness of the Act, 25.0% had moderate awareness, and 15.0% had low or no awareness.
2. **Conflict Reduction:** 45.0% of respondents reported a significant reduction in open clashes, 30.0% reported minimal change, 16.7% reported increased retaliatory attacks, and 8.3% were uncertain.
3. **Food Security Impact:** 50.0% of respondents believed the Act positively impacted food security, 30.0% reported negative impacts, and 20.0% reported no significant impact.
4. **Challenges to Compliance:** The primary challenges were the high cost of ranch establishment (40.0%), inadequate enforcement and porous borders (30.0%), resistance from nomadic herders (20.0%), and lack of water and feed infrastructure (10.0%).
5. **Hypothesis Testing:** Both null hypotheses were rejected, confirming that the Act has a significant effect on food security and on the incidence of farmer-herder conflicts.

5.2 Conclusion

The Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act is an essential institutional instrument for mitigating farmer-herder clashes and safeguarding agricultural productivity. However, full realisation of its objectives requires addressing infrastructural deficits, strengthening legal enforcement, and fostering cooperative engagement between farmers and pastoralists. The study concludes that while the Act has contributed to a reduction in open clashes and improved food security in some areas, its effectiveness is constrained by enforcement gaps, economic barriers to ranch establishment, and resistance from nomadic herders. A holistic approach that combines legal enforcement with economic incentives, infrastructure development, and community engagement is necessary for sustainable food security in the region.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Public Enlightenment and Education:** Intensify enlightenment programmes via mass media, town hall meetings, and community workshops to educate stakeholders on compliance and peaceful coexistence. Special attention should be given to rural areas where awareness is low.
2. **Institutional and Financial Support:** Provide government subsidies and soft loans to livestock farmers to ease the high financial burden of establishing modern ranches. The establishment of ranch development funds and public-private partnerships should be explored.
3. **Strengthening Security and Community Partnership:** Empower security agencies with necessary equipment and intelligence-gathering frameworks, while fostering active collaboration with local communities to monitor border corridors and enforce compliance. Community policing initiatives should be strengthened.
4. **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in water and feed infrastructure for ranches to ensure their viability and sustainability. This includes boreholes, dams, and pasture development programmes.
5. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Establish a multi-stakeholder platform bringing together farmers, herders, community leaders, government officials, and civil society to dialogue on issues of mutual concern and co-create solutions.
6. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to track the implementation of the Act and its impact on food security, with periodic reviews and adjustments as necessary.
7. **Research and Documentation:** Encourage further research on the effectiveness of anti-open grazing laws and their impact on food security, livelihoods, and conflict dynamics in different contexts.

5.4 Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes several contributions to knowledge:

1. It provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the Benue State Anti-Open Grazing and Ranch Establishment Act on food security, filling a gap in the literature.
2. It applies structural functionalism as a theoretical framework for understanding the role of legal institutions in managing resource conflicts and ensuring food security.
3. It develops a conceptual framework that can be used to analyse the relationship between anti-open grazing legislation and food security in other contexts.
4. It provides practical recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders on how to improve the implementation of anti-open grazing laws.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The study had the following limitations:

1. The study was delimited to the North-West Senatorial District of Benue State, and findings may not be generalisable to other regions.
2. The reliance on self-reported data may be subject to recall bias and social desirability bias.
3. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality.
4. Insecurity in some areas limited access to certain communities, potentially affecting the representativeness of the sample.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should:

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of anti-open grazing laws on food security.
2. Compare the effectiveness of anti-open grazing laws across different states in Nigeria.
3. Examine the gendered dimensions of farmer-herder conflicts and food security.
4. Explore the role of traditional institutions and community-based mechanisms in conflict resolution.
5. Assess the impact of climate change on farmer-herder conflicts and food security outcomes.

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