Smallholder Farmers’ Data Portrait

What the numbers tell us about smallholder farms

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Smallholders cultivate farms that are often much smaller than one hectare.

In some countries smallholder farm sizes can be really small – on average in Nepal smallholders farm 0.52ha and in Kenya 0.47ha.
Housing and sanitation conditions are poor

In Kenya, 74% of houses have a dirt floor, and only 13% have walls made with bricks. In Nepal, about 78% of the smallholders’ houses have proper toilets and access to safe water. But only 12% have a non-dirt floor and 31% have access to electricity.
They produce between 60 and 80 percent of food.

In Nepal, 2.7 million smallholder farms make up for 70% of the food produced and in Bolivia, 653 thousands small holdings supply 85%.
Their per hectare productivity is at least 2 times higher than that of other farmers.

A smallholder in Tanzania, farming on average 0.9 hectares produces food worth $780 per hectare, as compared to an amount of $281 per hectare generated by a larger farmer cultivating 4.1 hectares.
Because they work on the farm at least 3 times more than other farmers

In Kenya, two family members work in one hectare of their farm every day and another family member joins them for half the time. In Nepal, nearly five family members work in the household farm.
But this productivity advantage weakens

There is some evidence that over time the productivity of smallholders increases slower than that of other farmers. This may be due to the emergence of supermarkets which require conditions that restrict access for smallholders – but also due to difficulties in technology adoption.
Few of them have access to innovation and credit

In Kenya, about 33 percent of smallholder households have access to credit. In Tanzania, few smallholders are reported to receive credit (17 percent). In Nepal, only about one fifth of the 2.7 million smallholder farms use improved seed varieties.
and their productive capital is little

In Ethiopia, about 4 percent of smallholders use machinery on their farms, which on average have a size of nearly one hectare. More than half of smallholders in Bangladesh have access to motorized equipment, mainly in the form of threshers, husking and ginning machines.
They produce many crops, but sell a small part of the food they produce.

Small farmers sell only a part of their production. In Kenya and Ethiopia, smallholders sell less than a quarter of their production, retaining most of it for in-household consumption. In Viet Nam, the proportion is 38 percent.
They also work off-farm but are paid less than other farmers.

In Ethiopia, three family members work off-farm per day. In Bangladesh 35 percent of total smallholding income is generated by working in sectors other than agriculture. Lack of education and capital makes smallholders move into low-cost and low-return activities, such as agricultural labour and petty commerce.
In many countries over 40% of smallholders are poor.

In Bolivia up to 83 percent of smallholders are poor as compared with a national poverty average of about 61 percent. In Ethiopia, where 30 percent of the entire population lives under the national poverty threshold, the poverty headcount ratio of smallholders is 48 percent.
They spent more than half of their income to buy/produce food.

Being poor means that a large proportion of the budget is spent on food. In Tanzania, an average smallholder family of five persons - living on $1.9 a day each - spends 81 percent of this budget on food. In Nicaragua, an average smallholding allocates nearly 60 percent of its budget to food.