

Market-oriented farm management for trainers of extension workers in Africa

Overview



Context

Africa has many smallholder farmers who for years have farmed primarily for household food consumption with some surplus sold to the market.

Farming forms an important part of livelihoods strategy, but has not been approached as a business.

Farming has not been approached as a profit-making undertaking.

Context

Globalizing markets present challenges and opportunities for small-scale farmers.

Africa is moving more and more to a cash economy; increased demand for food, fibre and fuel in cities.

Smallholder farmers need to consider ways and means of exploiting opportunities in markets.

Context

Important to gain understanding, skills and competence in farm management practices that aim at increasing incomes for farmers by selling in the market.

Farm management has often remained neglected in agricultural extension, in both the training of practitioners and in the job descriptions of extension workers.

Extension in the past has focused largely on issues of production and productivity, limiting itself to the transfer of technologies.

Context

The singular focus on production and technologies is not sufficient to meet the changes occurring at all levels of farming locally, nationally, regionally, internationally.

As smallholder and family farms become more and more integrated in the market economy, they have moved to more intensified ways of production, using 'modern' inputs and machinery, thereby increasing their productivity and total production.

Context

Farmers are increasingly diversifying their activities in relation to market opportunities.

Diversification means introducing new crops (like livestock) or new activities (like post-harvest processing and storage).

There are changes and advances occurring everywhere and on every front.

Inputs, equipment, technologies, social and labour structures and market opportunities are all changing and these are impacting on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Context

For many farmers this situation is relatively new.

Farmers now have to manage combinations of land, labour and other resources in a significantly different manner than in the past.

Farmers are confronted with problems they did not know before, such as variations in costs of fertilizers and other inputs.

Context

Farmers face difficulties in selling their produce at a good price.

They experience strong fluctuations in market prices and demands too extreme to meet the specific quality requirements needed for their products.

In short, they are confronted with farm management problems for which their past experience is of little support.

Context

Cannot speak about farmers, their farms and farm management without understanding the broader setting of the systems in which they find themselves.

Each farm operates in a unique system. While most farm systems have a number of aspects in common, each farm is unique.

Context

While the diversity of farming systems is enormous, according to different climates, ecological zones, socio-economic and socio-political situations, what is of central importance is the understanding that principles of market-oriented farming can be applied to most farming systems.

What is market-oriented farm management?

Market-oriented farm management is a term used to capture a body of concepts and skills aimed at supporting farmers who have begun to adjust (orient) their farming activities to the opportunities and demands of the market.

Farm management is all about making decisions on the farm.

What is market-oriented farm management?

Market-oriented farm management is all about making decisions on the farm that enable farmers to farm for profit, expanding their potential. Focuses attention on efficient production of farm products for profitable sale.

Effective market-oriented farm management should help farmers and their families sustainability and continuously increase their wealth over time and allow them to have more choices in life.

Aim of the training programme

Farmers need to learn new skills.

But what are these skills and to what kind of situations can they be applied?

This is what this training programme is all about: understanding some of the management challenges facing market-oriented farmers and mastering the tools which can be used to tackle them.

The first step is for you to understand farm management and learn how to use tools which can be applied by the farmers with whom you work.

Aim of the training programme

In this training programme you will learn about and practice the application of basic concepts and tools of market-oriented farm management to situations relevant to your own experience.

The principles and tools presented in this training may at first seem somewhat involved and complex; as the course progresses you will see that it is not about numbers and accuracy, but about understanding and awareness.

Aim of the training programme

The primary outcome will be knowledge, understanding and skills which will better equip you to assist farmers particularly as they become more market-oriented.

The aim is to contribute to building capacity by improving your skills as extension personnel and through you, the farmers with whom you work.

Note 1

It is not the intention of this training course to get you to change farmers into market-oriented farmers.

The aim is more to help farmers understand why they make the choices they make and how to improve their decision-making skills.

Note 2

It is up to you to apply the concepts and tools learned in this training to the unique settings of each of the farmers and groups of farmers to whom you give management advice.

You will also want to acquire a general understanding of how farmers and farming systems are linked to the global environment in which these are functioning.

Note 3

The degree to which farmers themselves are an integral part of the governance and delivery of extension services will largely determine how successful and effective extension services can be.

Success rests in partnerships with farmers; incorporating farmer-to-farmer approaches, working informal groups of farmers and working with formal farmers' organizations, at village, district and national level.

The learning principle

Experiential learning.

The general format is a combination of individual readings, group review and in class exercises.

Exercises will be highly interactive.

Creative learning, training and presentations kills

The learning principle

The programme is guided by a facilitator, but all need to actively participate; interaction, critique, evaluation.

You are responsible for your own learning.

It is essentially a process of discovery through reading, discussion, practice and reflection

Training programme overview

Module 1: Getting started

Module 2: Understanding the farm setting

Module 3: Farm management decision-making

Module 4: Farm management tools

Module 5: Participatory approaches

Module 6: Planning

Module 7: Review, evaluation, examination

Training programme duration

The training programme runs for about 14 days.

It can be lengthened or shorted, but 10 days is the minimum.