

Ghanaian farmers get customized farming information via SMS messages

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FoodAfrica work package no. 6 focuses on improving market access for small-scale farming through the provision of market information by modern information and communication technology. In Ghana the FoodAfrica partner IFPRI, together with a local network operator Esoko, has recently started providing agricultural market information, such as customized crop price information, to sample households twice a week via SMS messages. Soon a similar service will be tested also in Uganda.

FoodAfrica's approach is unique, compared to previous projects on using ICTs for farmers, in that the information provided is customized to the participating farmers' specific needs. Farmers benefit to the extent that it improves their knowledge about current prices in different markets and allows them to change their marketing behavior. Based on the information they receive via text messages, the farmers may find a market place, buyer or marketing time best suitable for them. All in all the farmers who are on top of things have a stronger position in the market and they might be able to negotiate better prices for their products. How much better off they are, is the question explored by the current testing phase.

The SMS's include information about crops and varieties per region, [seasonality](#), price details of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and list of stockists within the 10 kilometer radius, [current market](#) prices, forecast of [market trends](#), [weather information](#), transport prices from points of production and a list of buyers.

The service is provided to literate farmers who own a mobile phone

To be eligible for the service the farmers need to own a mobile phone and be literate. According to a [baseline survey](#) conducted by IFPRI, 59 percent of Ghanaian households have a mobile phone, but few of them use it to obtain agricultural market information. Preliminary results of a similar survey done in Uganda shows that 70 percent of Ugandan farmer households have at least one functioning mobile phone.

FoodAfrica provides the service in co-operation with two local companies: Esoko and FIT-Uganda. Both companies provide training and information to the participating farmers. In Ghana the training is done face to face but in Uganda it will be done over the phone. Most of the information after the training is delivered to the farmers via SMS messages.

The companies collect price data on various commodities in various markets. The farmers who participate in the pilot study testing the service, get SMS messages with prices of several commodities in several nearby markets. The information is customized so that each farmer gets info on the commodities and markets he is most interested in. The SMS delivery is automated, making use of a database that includes price info, phone numbers, and the preferences of each subscriber.

The pilot study will run for approximately two years. After this a survey will be conducted by the FoodAfrica team where the effect and usefulness of the service for households will then be verified.

More information: www.mtt.fi/foodafrica

Provided by MTT Agrifood Research Finland

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