

Majority of farmers willing to pay for plant health advice, new research shows

June 20 2022



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The majority of farmers surveyed in Bangladesh, Rwanda and Zambia are willing to pay for visits to CABI-led Plantwise plant clinics, which help diagnose potentially devastating crop pests and diseases as well as

ways to mitigate impacts on yields.

An international team of experts led by Adewale Ogunmodede, Junior Agricultural Economist based at CABI's center in Egham, UK, found that 64% of farmers surveyed are willing to pay an amount sufficient to cover the operational costs of plant clinics. This is so that they can continue to receive advice to help increase their yields and livelihoods.

The researchers, which also include those from CABI's center in Switzerland; Cranfield University, UK; the University of Ibadan, and Olabisi Onabanjo University, both in Nigeria, learned that farmers are willing to pay 0.27 USD, 0.85 USD and 2.225 USD per visit respectively.

Data was obtained from 602, 637 and 837 households between 2018 and 2019 in Bangladesh, Rwanda and Zambia. Farmers who had previously visited a plant clinic were surveyed and focal pests were fruit flies on pumpkin in Bangladesh and fall armyworms (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) on maize in Rwanda and Zambia.

The researchers, whose research is published in the *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, also learned that only a few farmers—ranging from around 1% in Rwanda to 16% in Zambia—were not willing to contribute financially towards the sustainability of the plant clinics.

The plant clinic extension approach is part of the global Plantwise program managed by CABI, and supports smallholder farmers by providing face-to-face crop pest diagnosis and management advice to farmers.

The first plant clinic was opened in Bolivia in 2003 before spreading to 35 developing countries where around 5,000 plant clinics have been

established to provide free pest diagnostic and advisory services.

There are currently 30 plant clinics and over 200 plant doctors in Bangladesh, 66 plant clinics in Rwanda staffed by 350 plant doctors and 121 plant clinics and 350 plant doctors in Zambia.

Mr Ogunmodede said, "External funders are now paying for the plant clinic operations, which raises worries about their long-term viability if the funding stops.

"These findings imply that farmers value the services provided by plant clinics and are inclined to contribute financially towards their sustainability. It would be helpful to pilot fee-paying plant clinic services to gauge farmers' actual willingness to pay.

"Our findings also suggest that in some contexts, more educated and wealthier farmers, as well as members of farmer associations, could be targeted to pay the actual per-user cost of maintaining plant clinic services."

The scientists also suggest that poor and older households could be permitted to pay subsidized fees in order not to be excluded from fee-based plant clinic services.

Dr. Justice Tambo, co-author and socio-economist at CABI's center in Switzerland, said, "Future research would be worthwhile to explore the farmers' most preferred payment methods, thereby encouraging more [farmers](#) to participate in the payment system.

"For example, Cartmell has reported that in Latin America, the sustainability of plant clinics is achievable through payment of levies to farmer associations that offer plant clinic services."

The researchers conclude that their willingness to pay estimates only cover the costs of running plant clinics already established. They suggest that funding commitments from national or local implementing organizations would be needed to cover the expenses associated with establishing the plant clinics.

This includes plant clinic staff training, data management, and the purchasing of clinic equipment, such as portable microscopes or hand lens tablets, and tents.

One approach, the scientists say, to cover the initial setup costs and contribute towards the sustainability of plant clinics, would be to integrate this extension model into national or local government agricultural policies or extension strategies.

More information: Adewale M. Ogunmodede et al, Farmers' willingness to pay towards the sustainability of plant clinics: evidence from Bangladesh, Rwanda and Zambia, *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/14735903.2022.2082018](https://doi.org/10.1080/14735903.2022.2082018)

Provided by CABI

Citation: Majority of farmers willing to pay for plant health advice, new research shows (2022, June 20) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-06-majority-farmers-health-advice.html>

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