

Farmers who Learn Together, Grow Together

Most households in the small-scale farming sector in Zimbabwe live in poverty due to declining crop yields caused by a number of constraints, especially soil fertility, weeds and pests. Seeking solutions to these problems, CPP-funded research, from 1996 to 2002, has developed appropriate crop establishment and weed management technologies which are now being promoted to farmers, through the private sector (for the provision of inputs), development agents and farmer groups and through farmer-led and managed trial and demonstration plots. This promotional approach is already increasing productivity and leading to increased income generation through improving farmers' access to knowledge and inputs.

The approach to information promotion is based on facilitating the establishment of farmer groups, with lead farmers from each group providing resources for testing researcher proven but new, to the farmer,

methods. During the growing season, this is augmented by regular 'learning' sessions with extension agents. In less than two years and despite the country's political instability some 64 groups and over 1300 farmers are participating in these activities.



The effect of different treatments on the rice and maize crop being assessed by the farmer group



A farmer indicates advantages of growing maize on the ridge and rice in the furrow to another group member

Target areas have included the Zambezi Valley, where cotton is widely grown, and Masvingo, where wetland areas are used for growing cotton and rice. During the study process farmers 'learn by doing' and are able to give their assessments of the advantages and disadvantages on the technologies being tested to the extension staff. For example, in one group the farmers – both men and women – concluded that the increased labour requirements in making beds and ridges were more than compensated by the additional yields.

In Zimbabwe, project R8191 is not only promoting research outputs to farmers but also building the capacity of organisations to become effective knowledge providers for farmers.

R8191: Promoting improved crop management in cotton and cereal-based cropping systems in semi-arid areas

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