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Farm Assurance — Friend or Foe of Small Scale Farmers in Developing Countries?

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Abstract

European consumers are increasingly paying attention to food safety especially if raw materials or fresh produce are originating from developing countries. Laws have become stricter, as governments and supermarkets have responded to food scandals and growing consumer concerns. Food quality controls on European and imported produce include legal limits on the maximum pesticide residue level permitted in fresh produce, as well as on independent quality criteria of retailers like ecological and social production standards or traceability of goods from individual farms to supermarkets — complex catalogues of requirements farmers have to comply with in so called „farm assurance“ processes.

Farm assurance provides controlled and more efficient production of agricultural raw materials. It is thought as a farmers' response to globalisation. With respect to the European consumer it reassures and improves confidence in agricultural products. But what does it mean for small scale farmers of developing countries? Are they able to avoid to be excluded from the export market?

In 2002, we assessed the Ghanaian pineapple production sector before the introduction of retailer certification programmes (especially EurepGAP - Euro-retailer produce working group - Good Agricultural Practices) in order to forecast the after-effects of such farm assurance systems on small scale farmers. Recently, we are evaluating what happened since 2003. We shall report how conflicts between food safety requirements, sharp supermarket purchasing practices and the position of small and medium-scale farmers is managed in the pineapple export sector of Ghanaian economy. The results show that on one hand the challenge to comply with the criteria led to improved educational and infrastructural conditions but on the other hand created enormous financial problems for small scale farmers. The most effective action to prevent exclusion of the world market was the integration of small scale farmers to cooperatives which increased in two years three-fold. Valuable certification systems allow joined certifications of such cooperatives.

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