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“Agricultural development within the rural-urban continuum”

Agricultural Development in the Knowledge Economy: “Closeness” in Access to Information and Innovation

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Abstract

In the current knowledge-based system of agricultural growth and development, improved farmer access to relevant, timely and user-friendly information can be a crucial input for innovation and thus for rural and agricultural development and growth. Such innovation can come about as the effective and successful use of newly developed (or discovered) production technologies, improved harvest and post-harvest inputs and processes, the application of tried environmentally friendly production practices or organizational and institutional arrangements that support farmers in reaching new markets and better negotiation stances, among others.

Previous studies of diffusion and adoption of innovations have identified some characteristics that are more commonly found among those who innovate, such as access to sources of finance, ownership of the land on which the crop is grown, level of schooling, size of the farm. In this paper, We aim at exploring a part of the innovation process that is still considered to be contained within a black-box: what factors drive the decision of a farmer to innovate?

Learning, either through experience or through a training process and access to information are considered crucial in the decision to innovate. It is hypothesized, that if a farmer is able to observe the learning process of other farmers, he/she will profit from the investment in learning and experimenting undertaken by his/her neighbor and will him/herself perceive lower costs to learning, accelerating the decision to innovate and to adopt new farming technologies. If this is true, then, a different degree of “closeness” (in a familiar, local or experiential sense) to the sources of information on new technologies that a farmer has access to, has a different impact on his/her decision to innovate. An attempt to test this is undertaken in the context of Colombian cacao producers.

When observed in isolation, the impact of the degree of closeness of the sources of information on the decision to innovate is marginal; however, in interaction with other aspects that may be determined by the rural-urban continuum (such as availability of farm labour, how cosmopolite farmers are and their access to mobile technologies or internet), a higher degree of “closeness” to the sources of agriculturally relevant information become more significant.

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