Tropentag, September 18-21, 2016, Vienna, Austria

"Solidarity in a competing world — fair use of resources"

Cuba's Agricultural Innovation System

Friedrich Leitgeb, Christian R. Vogl

University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Dept. of Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Austria

Abstract

Innovations are the driving force for agricultural development under present diverse situations of uncertainty. The innovation system perspective acknowledges the contributions made by all stakeholders involved in knowledge development, dissemination and appropriation. According to the specific agricultural production system, farmers adopt innovations, modify them or innovate on their own. This paper examines the role of farmers' experiments and innovations in Cuba's agricultural innovation and knowledge system (AKIS), identifies knowledge exchange encounters and describes some strategies implemented to institutionalize farmers' experiments and innovations. The research methods comprised 34 semi-structured interviews with agricultural experts from the science, administration and advisory system, and 31 free list questionnaires to assess the institutional influence on farmers' experiments and innovations. In addition, three case studies of outstanding farmers' experiments are presented, based upon extensive participant observation at their farms. The results suggest that the government's commitment to social participation in knowledge development provides the basic prerequisite for an effective integration of farmers' experiments and innovation in Cuba. The historically conditioned vertical structure of knowledge development and dissemination is gradually changing toward more horizontal procedures. The dynamic exchange of ideas at all kinds of interactive meetings, such as workshops or farmers' field schools, have favoured farmer to farmer learning as well as knowledge sharing with research, academic and extension officials. This multi-stakeholders' approach contributes to institutionalize farmers' knowledge. Farmers' experiments and innovations play a major role in improving farm management and thereby can contribute to build resilience at the farming system level as well as for the national agricultural system.

Keywords: Innovation, knowledge systems, organic agriculture, organic farming

Contact Address: Christian R. Vogl, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Dept. for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Gregor-Mendel-Strasse 33, 1180 Vienna, Austria, e-mail: christian.vogl@boku.ac.at