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Cocoa Farmers’ Expectations and Motivation When Converting to Organic Agriculture

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Abstract

The global demand for organic cocoa is growing. In order to assure its future supply, more smallholder cocoa growers in the tropics must adopt organic agriculture (OA). However, little is known about farmers’ expectations of and their motivation to go through with organic certification as well as prevailing obstacles. Yet, this knowledge is crucial to properly support cocoa farmers in their OA conversion process and facilitate long-term relationships with value chain actors. We carried out semi-structured interviews with 205 cocoa farmers currently converting to OA in Central Uganda to examine their perception of OA. The farmers in our sample first heard of OA from the export company who organised the group certification (42 % of respondents) or the group’s lead farmer (29 %). Our results show that farmers perceived OA as a system in which chemicals are banned (63 %). Only 32 % described it as a system that promotes the use of organic inputs. 16 % of farmers were not able to describe OA at all. Perceived benefits of OA were lower production costs (36 %), reduced health risks for farmers (28 %), and improved soil fertility (24 %). The reported disadvantages include difficult pest and disease management (35 %) and ineffective organic inputs (15 %). To address the perceived high pest and disease pressure, 35 % of farmers continued applying synthetic pesticides, while only less than one third were using preventative management practices (32 %) or inputs (23 %). It is very likely that the organic price premium, which farmers will receive once certification is accomplished, will satisfy farmers’ expectation of a higher cocoa farm-gate price. However, our results also indicate that price premiums may not be a sufficiently large incentive to deter farmers from in compliance with organic standards. This applies especially if the understanding of OA is limited and the wish for certification did not emerge from within the farmer group, but was proposed from outside. Based on our findings, we suggest certification organisers to emphasise on farmer sensitisation on OA and its principles as well as capacity building that addresses specific farming issues. This could increase farmers’ benefits from OA and enable them to practice organic by conviction.

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