

# Challenges and Opportunities for Smallholder Integration into Commercial Agrifood Chains

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### Abstract

A compelling conversation is underway about how to engage smallholder farmers in established agrifood chains. More than half a billion farmers with less than 2 hectares of land are producing 80% of the food that is feeding today's world population. Hence, the importance and timeliness of this conversation should not be undervalued. Many sources project that the world's agricultural systems will need to produce almost 60% more food to feed nearly 10 billion people by 2050. But the challenges of engaging smallholders in agrifood chains are many. Public and private R&D efforts are significant, but smallholders' key constraints and the types of research and communication needed to reach them still appear unclear. Hence, it leads us to wonder: Can adopting innovations developed through research, government initiatives, or provision of physical infrastructure at no cost truly improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers without improving their engagement with, and contribution to, market-driven and private firm-led agrifood chains? Based on our experience, it is unlikely. Many bottlenecks exist. The many participants of agrifood chains have an imperative to learn how to work collaboratively and inclusively and must collectively identify and solve bottlenecks that are inhibiting smallholder adoption of change for mutual benefit. However, solving these bottlenecks will involve standing in the other person's shoes and seeing and understanding things from the smallholders' point of view in order to effectively drive change for mutual gain. Some commercial firms are investing heavily in farmer education and sustainability programs, and some initiatives have been successful. But how can we all become better drivers of this change?