



Kenyan farms often too small

Small-scale farmers in East Africa can increase food production levels substantially with intensive farming if they are given extra money, but they often do not have enough land to make a living even so. These findings come from the PhD research of Wytze Marinus in the Plant Production Systems chair group.

Marinus spent five years studying farmers in two locations in Kenya. Each season, all the farmers were given a voucher worth 100 dollars for agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and seed. The vouchers led directly to higher crop yields at all the sites. Maize yields, for example, increased from 16 per cent of the theoretical maximum to 40-50 per cent. Even so, only half of the farmers at most achieved incomes above the poverty line with the vouchers. With current farm sizes, most of the farmers were unable to earn a 'living income' – the income that is required for a nutritious diet, clothing, housing, schooling and healthcare. Marinus found that if farmers in two African regions are able to increase yields per hectare to 50 per cent of the maximum potential yield, 70 and 90 per cent respectively of the farmers could live off their small plots. Farmers in a third region would still need more livestock and land to make a decent living. AS