

Farmer Participatory IPM Research and Extension: Experiences in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

In the central highlands of East Africa, cash crops such as coffee are grown in mixed cropping systems with a wide range of food crops. Recent studies have shown a dramatic rise in the use of pesticides by the small-scale farmers in such cropping systems, this leading to widespread concern about increases in crop production costs as well as health and environmental risks. The cost of agrochemical inputs (fertilisers and pesticides) absorbs a large proportion of farmers' income but the farmer is faced with little choice due to the lack of readily available alternative crop management options to improve production on sustainable levels. A holistic approach to sustainable pest (insects, diseases, nematodes, weeds) and soil management is needed to reduce agrochemical inputs, improve crop production on sustainable levels and so boost farm income.

To this end, a pilot farmer participatory integrated pest management (IPM) training project in coffee and vegetable systems was initiated in Kenya in 1995. The aim of the project was to introduce farmer participatory IPM implementation in cropping systems which have previously been shown to be using excessive amounts of agrochemicals, and drawing upon the methods developed in the successful farmer field schools (FFS) approach to IPM pioneered on rice in Asia.

The pilot project completed its initial phase in September 1996. It has developed and tested curricula for training of trainers and farmers, held farmer field schools on coffee and vegetable small scale farming systems which have captured the imagination and attention of the participants. It has demonstrated that coffee and vegetables can be grown with substantially reduced synthetic agrochemical inputs while maintaining or increasing yields. It has empowered farmers to be able to make informed decisions on crop management and it has clearly generated considerable enthusiasm amongst the participating farmers. This holistic approach to crop management is the way towards sustainable improved crop production and farm incomes as well as reduce both environmental and health risks.