

Characterization of Vegetable Farmers in Western Kenya and the Economic Implication

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Vegetables contribute significantly to the Kenyan horticultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Vegetable farmers however face various constraints during production and marketing thus affecting their productivity.

Malnutrition is a key challenge in Western Kenya where over 50 % of the children lack a diversified diet. Both chili and spider plant are rich in vitamins and minerals, hence important components for a nutritionally diversified diet. Due to the economic, social and nutritional importance of these vegetables, this paper therefore characterizes chili and spider plant farmers basing on their socio-economic and institutional characteristics. This study is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from 300 smallholder vegetable farmers in Bungoma and Busia Counties, Kenya. Results show that, about half of the respondents participated in vegetable contract farming. Farmers are motivated to participate in contract farming by the desire to access farm inputs in form of credit, market, technical expertise and stable market for their produce. It was revealed that, for both chili and spider plant farmers, the proportion of farmers who accessed agricultural credit was slightly higher among contract participants (62 %) as compared to non-participants (60 %). A bigger proportion of contracted vegetable farmers (37 %) are motivated to participate in contract farming by expectation of an assured market. This percentage was higher in Busia (41%) than Bungoma (35%). This is explained by the desire to access stable market linkages by smallholder vegetable farmers. To improve the welfare of vegetable producers, the county governments and private sector should invest more in agricultural extension services to boost productivity of smallholder producers through dissemination of good agricultural practices. Contract farming as an institution should be strengthened in order to create efficiency in production and marketing of vegetable and vegetable products as well as enhance input supply, market linkages and high incomes among smallholder farmers.

Keywords: Contract farming, farmers, Vegetables