



MODERNIZING EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES WITH DIVERSE PARTNERS AND ICT

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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PRESENTERS

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PRESENTATION

Julie MacCartee: I think it's about time to get started with our content. And so, I'd like to quickly introduce our three speakers today. First up will be Andrea Bohn, who is the Associate Director for the USAID-funded projects INGENAES, which stands for Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension and MEAS, which is Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services. And Andrea is stationed at the University of Illinois, and we'll be happy to have her kick things off today.

After Andrea we will move along to Shaun Ferris, who is the Director of Agricultural Livelihoods with Catholic Relief Services. And he is a coauthor of the MEAS discussion paper that hopefully you were able to download and that we'll be highlighting today.

And then, we will move along to Gretchen Villegas – I hope I pronounced that correctly – who is Vice President for International Operations at the National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International, or NCBA CLUSA. And Gretchen has just recently settled here in D.C. after a long career in the field, so we're excited to have her in the D.C. area.

So, to kick us off, I will pass the microphone over to Andrea Bohn, who is joining us remotely, and allow her to give her introduction. So, Andrea, please take it away.

Andrea Bohn: Yes. Well, hello, everybody. Do I have control of the slides? Wonderful.

So, today, we'll be talking about linking farmers to markets and implications for extension and advisory services. The things we'll be talking about is basically: What is extension? What is it farmers might want to know? What are their market options? And how do we link those farmers to market options? We'll talk a little bit about new extension models and new trends in agricultural development and extension overall. We will actually skip over the SWOT analysis, realizing that we have a limited amount of time, so that we can devote more of the discussion to the conclusions.

So, what is *extension*, actually? While there isn't a universally-accepted definition, I just want to make sure that all of you are on the same page with me, that extension is not just about information dissemination or knowledge transfer. Think about it more as facilitation: facilitating access of farmers, their organizations, and other market actors to knowledge, information, and technologies. But it's also to facilitate their interaction with partners in research, education, agribusiness, and other relevant institutions, and to assist them ultimately in developing their own technical, organizational, and management skills and practices. So, this is the widely-used definition that Ian Cristoplos brought up, but again, there's many definitions out there. Just please, in you thinking, don't limit it to information dissemination.

We had the question earlier: What is modern extension? Well, we sort of like to talk about these seven hallmarks of an effective system of service. First of all, it really needs to be demand-driven. It should be responding to need and bottom-up – you know, be farmer-led, instead of the top-down approaches that are still so prevalent in many places around the world.

Ideally, extension services are provided in a decentralized manner. Surely, there do need to be some central functions, but what we're looking at, again, is that those who provide services are very close to their clients, so that they really understand where the needs and opportunities are and tailor the services accordingly.

There's broadening understanding that extension really needs to be market-oriented, and to support farming as a business rather than farmer as a livelihood, and producing for markets rather than marketing what has been produced. And there's a very small group of financing extension services, and the big challenge, of course, is how to do that sustainably. We could have a long discussion on that subject in and of its own, but of course this is really important to keep in mind: to provide a service that can be sustained in the long run. And there may be various players who could be contributing to the financing of these services.

Ideally, extension services will be provided by different types of actors. There isn't a "one size fits all," and different providers of extension-type services can come from different types of institutions. These could be public service providers – typically, the Minister of Agriculture, civil society organizations, NGOs, or private, for-profit entities.

We really want to make sure that we reach all farmers and that, particularly, gender equity is taken into account. We're very far away from doing that well, but a good extension service will be gender-equitable.

Information communication technologies offer new opportunities, and some of it is taking back – bringing back the classics, such as radio. But you’ve all heard of multiple new applications coming through phones, from anything from simple phones to smart phones.

So, these are the seven hallmarks that we’d like to see in a good modern extension system for it to be effective. Now, we’re not going to do an entire conversation on who provides what kind of services, but let me just briefly talk about some of the numbers we see. Government extension has the reputation of being weak in many developing countries, but it’s really quite amazing when you think about how many are involved in this. So, Kenya is driving towards having 5,000 staff. Ethiopia is targeting having 65,000 staff in the field. They’re not quite there yet, but that’s the goal. In Bangladesh, there is about 13,500 field staff for crops alone. And in Malawi, in recent years we’ve counted about 2,500.

Now, in terms of ratios – extension staff to farmers – we’re talking about a ratio of one field agent to 2,500 farmers in many of these countries. In Ethiopia, they’ll actually bring the numbers down to one extension staff to about 450, and that’s closer to the ideal number that we’d like to see.

But then, there’s also extension services provided by NGOs, as mentioned beforehand. The NGOs themselves often are relatively small, although of course there are those that have 100 or more staff, but quite typically, they’re more in the tens or twenties. And one of the things that MEAS has really noticed in its analysis in the field is that the NGOs actually rely quite heavily on public sector extension staff to implement the work at the field level.

The other thing to note about extension is that they do work intensely in small areas, and maybe moving on to other areas and other topics. And that’s really very much driven by their mission, but also what kind of programs they get funding for. So, it’s not always as ideally close to the farmers, but rather also driven very much by the funding sources.

In the future, we will most certainly rely a lot more on the private sector to provide advisory-type services, but in terms of players the numbers are small. Certain types of private sector companies may have a lot of staff, especially in selling inputs, but we’re not at the point yet where we can truly say that those are providing comprehensive extension services. And they may never, because they have a very particular business case that they’re following, and they’re often highly specialized to specific crops.

So, the main point here is that there are many different players and we have many different types of farmers. So, there isn’t a “one size fits all;” that’s for sure. And farmers are very diverse. They’re very diverse in terms of farm size. Are

they located close to market? What is the specific infrastructure like? Are they subsistence-oriented or are they market oriented?

And on this slide we merely want to point out one aspect of the diversity among farmers, and that is the farm size. And please note that in Tanzania – this is not untypical for other countries as well – three-quarters of the farmers operate on less than three hectares. In fact, less than 60% have less than two acres. And so, in terms of providing good services farm size definitely needs to be taken into account. They are a diverse lot, and if we want to provide good services, we need to take things like this into account.

And with that, Shaun, I'll hand over to you.

Shaun Ferris:

Thanks very much, Andrea. And good morning, everybody – or, good afternoon, wherever you are today.

I would just like to follow up on what Andrea said about this diversity of farmers, and therefore the diversity of information that they actually need. So, thinking about this and thinking about farmers developing their own livelihoods at very different levels and different paces, we were sort of trying to gather information on: What is the key questions that farmers are actually asking for in modern extension services?

So, these are some of the questions, I think, that people are really starting to focus on. Farmers are really looking to see how they can optimize their land and use their skills most effectively to support a range of different crops and livestock on their farms. And so, very often, we're seeing that farmers are not just asking about one or two crops; they're really trying to see: What is the best mix of options that they can have for their particular situation?

I think it's also important for them to be able to compare themselves against averages and other market options. And I think one of the questions that farmers really would like to know is: How well are they actually doing? And so, it would be very helpful to be able to provide information to them based on their production versus others. And then, to be talking to them about: How much would it actually cost for them to be able to upgrade their systems? And I think the question that really comes to mind when you're talking to farmers about this is that – a lot of risks involved in doing that upgrading process, and they really want to know: How much are they going to get out of that process if they start to make those investments?

And I think the other questions that really come to mind, then, are the things like whether people are going to be working as individual farmers or whether they're going to be working in farmer groups. And Gretchen is going to be talking a lot about this, the advantages of farmers in group. But there are some trends for more farmers working as individuals. If people are going to go through this

upgrading process, clearly they want to know where their inputs are coming from, prices of inputs, and also the quality of those inputs.

I think a key underlying factor in doing a lot of this upgrading process is the idea of: Where is the financing going to be coming from? And I think that's an area that we're going to come back to several times in this talk, about the opportunities and prospects for new financial services.

I think farmers are also looking for coaching support. So, as they go through the season, to get information relative to things like weather, about best times for planting, for the weeding, and application of fertilizer, or to be doing certain farming practices. But to be getting support throughout the season. Weather is clearly important for people. And one of the most important days of the farming year is the sales points. And so, this whole aspect of providing farmers with more information about: What are the market opportunities? How can they engage with buyers more effectively? And when and where should they sell their produce? And I guess that does in the end come down to: How are you going to get that produce to market? And what are the ways you can reduce major costs to people – like the costs of getting their goods to market?

So, those are the kinds of questions we would like to see answered, I think, in a good extension service. And there are many types of farmers asking those questions. So, I'm just going to have a quick look at the range of farmers that Andrea pointed to earlier on.

When we are working in the field, we see that there's a major difference in the types of farmers that we're actually working with. And this graphic just very simply shows a breakdown, if you like, of the types of farmers that we are quite often working with. You have the largest percentage of farmers who are not linked to markets very effectively. They are people who are often in chronic poverty situations, small land areas, and struggling to engage with markets effectively.

There's another section of the community, however, who are more stabilized. They have assets. And that particular group are looking for a more intensive process of gaining skills to enable them to use their assets and to work with markets more effectively. And then, you have another group of farmers who are actually already engaging markets in a fairly consistent basis. So, with that diversity of farmers within a community, I think it's important that we work towards this process of providing more tailored types of extension services to these different types of farmers.

And if I just go to – if we think about that in the sense of different types of farmers, they are also engaging with very different types of markets. So, on the left hand side of this slide, you will see that we have these informal markets – I think this is where the majority of the farmers are selling their goods – and that is

a whole range of different markets from the farm gate through various sizes of markets, getting to the urban centers. Within this area, I think it's also fair to say that the labor markets in this area are fairly unregulated. And the access to financing for these particular farmers working in those more informal markets tends to be through local money lenders, and increasingly through farmers using savings and sort of internal loan schemes to help build small amounts of capital that they can start to invest in their farming systems.

On the other side of this idea of market segmentation, you have emerging numbers of more formalized markets. Now, these can be more formalized private sector markets leading into millers, processing factories, export crops, but also with governments increasingly providing more structured markets to their procurement processes. I think it's – in this area you're seeing much more formalization of the labor force as well, so you're starting to see more contracts and people employed on a more long-term basis. And as you get into these more formal markets, these are the people that are starting to benefit most effectively from new types of financial services, starting with microfinance, but then through rural banks, increasingly through mobile banks. And I think it's this sector which is starting to move beyond the idea of pilots, with things like insurance and linking into trade finance through more formal systems. So, this slide is just to say that in addition to highly segmented farmers we have a lot of segmentation in the market opportunities as well.

I think when you look at the analysis of farmers who are linked to these formal markets this particular area shows a lot of promise. And I think there are many projects and areas people are working with, particularly in the value chain area, where you're starting to see farmers linking with these more formalized markets and showing year-on-year gains in their incomes. So, these people are working in systems where there's less risk in a sense of supplying the market, but they're getting support in terms of the right technologies. They are getting better advisory services. And they're getting information on how they can start to finance their production and sales into these markets. And there's just one of the papers here which goes through a number of case studies to show how those types of farmers are making progress.

And here's just a little bit of data from one of the projects that we were running in Nicaragua. And this just shows that the farmers that were involved in selling fresh vegetables – which is a lucrative market area – through Project Work were showing year-on-year gains in income. And that process, I think, is something which we're seeing repeatedly in places where you have these formal links to markets. So, that's a promising area of growth, I think.

So, on the other side of this, we have a lot of farmers in the majority of markets who are working in these informal situations, and a lot of these farmers are not

making the same level of progress. And you'll see from this slide, which shows the number of net sellers and net buyers, that when you're talking about the more extensive green crops, a lot of farmers – high percentages, 50%, 60%, 70% of the farmers – are still net buyers. So, we've really got to look at extension services which support these farmers, which is looking at diversification in addition to providing upgrading of the main staple crops. I think it's clear to say that people are not making a huge amount of money in these main staple crop areas unless they start to have much more sizeable land areas. So, this division of land is a really critical part in the analysis of how we're going to be providing more effective extension services in the future.

Okay. So, keeping things moving along, what does this really mean in terms of this pluralism that Andrea mentioned in the first slides? I think what we're seeing here with this highly diversified number of farmers, a range of different products and markets, there is also a commensurate sort of spectrum of different types of partnerships that are supporting smallholder farmers. So, we still have a lot of people coming out of the public service area, but we're seeing more in the public private sector, and also an increasing number of people from the private sector that are providing support to smallholder farmers.

And I think from this side, again, you're seeing a range of different types of financing systems that are going into this area, starting with philanthropy and emergency relief in the public sector, but then walking through this process of savings and loans, microfinance. And then, increasingly looking at this idea of private finance and venture capital or impact investment coming to support farmers that are linking to more formalized markets. So, there's a whole range of aspects here. And I think that here is where you're starting to see things like contracting playing a greater role. Certification is playing an important role in bringing farmers into markets with improved sustainable farming systems. And also, the public sector is coming to formalize links with farmers. So, there's a range of different ways in which people are starting to finance these areas.

So, when it comes to modernizing extension services, I think you can see that there are a lot of challenges still out there. But I think there is also a number of promising models that are starting to show the ability to go to scale. And in the next few slides, we're going to go into a series of examples where we can see what these new models are and how they're starting to link more different types of farmers to different types of markets.

And just before I hand over to Gretchen, I'd just like to say about one of the projects that we have been working on in Ethiopia where we have very smallholder farmers selling white pea beans, which are baked beans, into formal markets. And one of the sort of major findings or takeaways from this work was that it takes many different types of service providers to support an

effective value chain. And I think there – here is an opportunity for us to look at how we can bring together different actors to support different parts of the chain. And it's this ability to facilitate a combination of different actors who are providing services not just to the farming community but to the traders, the cooperatives, in terms of their management and financing, but also to the processors and their links into other markets throughout their value chain.

So, this idea of bringing together different service providers, I think, is a really important part of a modern approach to extension. And with that, I'll hand over to Gretchen.

Gretchen Villegas:

Hello, everyone. Thank you, Shaun and Andrea for providing such a great foundation in terms of all of us really understanding the current status of extension, as well as moving us now into looking at how to modernize that extension.

I'm very pleased today to have the opportunity to speak with all of you about some examples of how we've began modernizing some of these extension ideas, especially in looking through cooperative development at the National Cooperative Business Association, better known as NCBA CLUSA.

We've found that working through cooperative development models actually builds strong societies and integrate especially those smallholder farmers that Andrea and Shaun were talking about earlier into functional value chains with active private sector partners. And we do this through looking at the seven internationally-known cooperative principles. So, up here on the slide you'll be seeing the seven cooperative principles, which we really try to work through with the cooperatives in terms of building their capacity.

So, as you'll see, a cooperative is really community-organized and comes together with a common interest. It's owned by the people. They have an economic or a business interest, normally. They make their own decisions. And maybe most importantly is the fifth cooperative principle, in terms of education, training, and information. This really has been a strong milestone for cooperatives worldwide, and it really does embody valuing extension and making sure that others are learning from extension within their group and also within their community. And then, of course, the seventh one of concern for community is making sure we come up with sustainable solutions.

So, we use these seven cooperative principles throughout our programming in different countries to really create productive, economically viable partners in society. And this is really providing a platform. We've seen in most of the design of our programs for smallholder farmers either to reach this extension service through the cooperative member services that are provided or their linkages into private sector.

So, in terms of cooperatives, in countries where we work with agricultural value chains we've really found that cooperatives are excellent entry points for these extension services. So, if a farmer is asking themselves, "How do I get the best price for my commodities?" – okay? – The cooperative is able to answer that in terms of bulking commodities. So, if you have many smallholder farmers and those smallholder farmers are only producing a smaller amount of metric tonnage of their commodity, but they bring it together and bulk that commodity, they are then able to negotiate with buyers with a volume of sales. And therefore, they are able to have more negotiating power.

The question at the end of the day is also: "In order to reach these volume commodities, how do we do that?" So, "We're smallholder farmers; we don't have access to, say, the financing that we need." Well, if you become part of a cooperative, you then reap the benefit of the membership services. So, as part of the cooperative, when there is sales in bulk its generated income. You are able to save in a village savings and loan association, which is then managed by the cooperative itself. You're able to access credit, because financing institutions are willing to work with cooperatives because they're groups of community members that will guarantee one another. And if you can bulk your commodities, you can also then buy your agricultural inputs in bulk. And that reduces the cost for your agricultural inputs, meaning you can buy more and you can then produce more.

So, due to the volumes and the group orientation in terms of the commodities, the private sector can then either provide services for a fee along the value chain in which you're working – whatever value chain that is – or, due to the sheer volumes, the private sector can actually make profit on the venture. So, the private sector *wants* to work with a cooperative instead of an individual farmer because they're able to find the quality and the volumes they require.

So, if we look at membership services, one membership service that we're finding to be very helpful in the field is our community-based service providers. The community-based service providers fill the gaps in the value chain for services and help the cooperatives – and obviously, the farmers – reach their potential. We have been using community-based service providers for five or six years now in the field. This model comes from knowing that farmers respond best from people within their communities. So, we've worked very carefully with the cooperative groups to find village leaders and those who really have been motivated to help their communities. And we link those community members to the local input supply firms that we're working with.

When we link them, we work with the local input supply firms to assist them in understanding these agriculture extension information in terms of cost and sales and production methods, much of which Shaun was talking about earlier in terms

of really understanding: Do you need a mixed diversity of crops in order to increase your income? What does your cash flow look like? How do you make sure that you have genuine inputs and not fake inputs? So, in working with the local input supply firms, we help them understand these extension messages.

These extension messages are then trained to the local agents, who we call the community-based service providers. And those community-based service providers actually mobilize themselves in the communities to become close to the cooperatives – and therefore, the farmers – and provide them this information as well as the products and services that they need, including seeds, tools, fertilizers, spraying herbicides, crop aggregation, or transportation.

So, when these messages are used by the agro input agents, or community-based service providers, they tend to sell more and make a commission on them from the local input supply firms. So, the messages being embedded allow the farmer to receive the extension that's needed and understanding that's needed in order to apply the agricultural input or technology properly. But at the same time, we increase the commission to the community-based service provider that's being paid from the local input supply firm.

So, the firm is happy because they're selling more. The community-based service provider is happy because he's making more commission. And the farmer is happy because at the end of the day we've actually increased the yields and productivity.

So, for instance, I would like to share with you a value chain which we're working with in Uganda, which is under a U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded program – however, that works very closely with USAID Feed the Future partners – in 13 districts in Northern Uganda. The project's reaching 60,000 smallholder farmers. Its enhancing production and sales of maize, beans, and soybeans.

On the left, what you see here is production. This is where farmers are producing the maize, beans, and soybeans. And in this project in Uganda, it's using conservation farming methodology as kind of the center point for this project. Now, the production, then – the producers, or the smallholder farmers, are organized into the primary cooperatives. The primary cooperatives are where they access the agro input supplies, and that's where the community-based service providers come in. It's also the place where they set up their village savings and loans associations. And they can also access financing from microfinance institutions that Shaun was also mentioning earlier.

Now, these primary cooperatives organize themselves in a geographical area so that they can create area cooperative enterprises. And this is the platform where

there's actual negotiation between the cooperative and the buyer. And this is where the volumes come in which assist the smallholder farmers in increasing their price that they're paid for the commodity.

Now, I'd like to share with you some examples of how we looked at this value chain and how we tried to answer many extension questions that farmers have within this value chain without providing any subsidies throughout the U.S. government funding. Okay?

So, kind of one of the first questions that came up was: "How..." – you know, a farmer would ask, "How do I learn new technologies?" You know, the new technology we're talking about is conservation farming. So, the question is: "How do I learn about that?" Now, it would have been easy for us as a project just to say, "Okay, we will train our staff. We'll put our staff in the field. And those staff will then train farmers, and farmers will train other farmers." Okay? What we decided to do was to bring in the government extension. So, on the top of this value chain side, you can see the government extension and the arrows going down into production and primary cooperatives. We trained government extension in conservation farming – in the principles and in actually how to do it – in each of the districts where we were operating.

Those government extensions were then paired with a private sector company in Northern Uganda who also had quite a large extension service within their company. And we trained that company, again in conservation farming and the principles. And we worked with the government extension and the company hand-in-hand to help them create a curriculum and roll out a plan to train the 60,000 farmers – of course, with some assistance from us in terms of mobilizing and organizing the farmers. But then, actually together giving out the extension services. Okay?

So, this is an opportunity where we saw a private sector partner would understand the return on investment in terms of knowing why they should invest in teaching and training in this conservation farming, because out of it they would get increased volumes and increased quality. And they want to do it with government because government is the gatekeepers. They're the true gatekeepers for the communities and for the cooperatives. Okay? So, we saw that to be really helpful because it's really an exit strategy all in one. It's a way to embed the extension. The private sector company will continue doing it, and the government is understanding how to work with the private sector along the way.

So, the next question that comes up is really: "How do I maximize my land?" So, I have – Andrea pointed out very clearly in the beginning: They're lucky – smallholder farmers are lucky if they have three hectares of land to manage. And so, we're really looking at between one to five hectares. They're very small

amounts of land.

So, in terms of conservation farming as a new technology, if you look at the red on the slide here, the “Tiller Service Provider,” the TSP that then goes up into production, there’s two ways to prepare land for conservation farming. One is through basins, which is digging holes, so there’s less disruption of the soil. The other is to use animal draft power and something which we call *tiller service providers* to displace very small amounts of the land.

We decided that we would train TSPs, who are lead farmers, and those tiller service providers would then provide a fee for service to the farmer in order to prepare the land. It has worked very well because farmers find digging the holes to be very time-consuming. And so, the tiller service provision adds an income for farmers. And also, preparation for land in a new technology has become very popular in Northern Uganda. And the question comes up: How do they – how do the farmers pay for this? Well, when you’re looking at a value chain which is integrated into a cooperative you have access to village savings and loan associations and that funding. But you also have access to financial services because, again, they can guarantee one another’s loans. So, again, this is only possible because they’re actually in a cooperative. If they were a smallholder farmer that was individual, it would not be possible in this circumstance.

Now, we already addressed the conservation farming production training. So, the next question is – okay, we trained the tiller service providers in how to do the ripping services properly in conservation processing. So, if I’m a farmer, how do I become a tiller service provider if NCBA CLUSA leaves? And that’s something that’s important as we’re moving forward in order to keep the technology moving forward.

So, farmers can actually become tiller service providers. They can go to the agro input supplier – so, if you look at the value chain here in the middle, we’ve got an agro input supplier leading up into the primary cooperative. A farmer can go to the agro input supplier and buy a ripper – and a ripper is an implement that will actually allow this animal draft power ripping. When they buy that ripper, there is a fee embedded in the cost, and it’s for the training. So, when they buy the ripper, a percentage of the cost goes to a tiller service provider – a farmer who is already trained – and the other part goes to the actual implement itself. The one farmer who buys the ripper is then trained by that farmer who has been trained already – with that payment for the training – and then is well equipped with that tool to go ahead and start the tiller service provision. So, that’s another way where we’re integrating the ability to pass on knowledge – but again, paying for it with a fee.

“So, how do I enhance my yields?” Very good question that comes up again and again. Well, this goes back to the community-based service provider slide.

These community-based service providers, as was discussed before, go directly out to the communities and sell the products to the farmers. Now, in conservation farming, the question was: How do we explain and reach more farmers in the adoption rate of conservation farming? Because in new technologies it's always the adoption rate that's the biggest issue.

So, what we did was: We trained the agro input companies. Remember, the companies are the ones that work directly with the service providers. We train them in conservation farming. And those companies trained the agro input providers or the community-based service providers. And those service providers with that knowledge were able to provide this extension knowledge and information to the farmers, sell their products at the very same time, increase their commissions, and make their companies very happy. And at the end of the day, of course, the farmer was very happy as well.

So, if you can integrate the technology directly into kind of an embedded – I would call it an embedded service provision where it's already embedded in the fact that if you provide the knowledge, you get a better return on investment, then it works.

The farmer will say, "How can I procure new technologies at an affordable price? If this is a brand new ripper attachment that goes on an animal draft power, how do I get that?" Well, as you can see here on the value chain, the CF tool manufacturer manufactures it locally. They give it to the agro input supplier. And that agro input supplier then is the one to work with the service providers so that they can take it out to the farmer and actually show them and teach them how to use it. Okay?

So, it's really all wrapped up in how the value chain is put together and how you utilize the partners – you know, what Shaun was talking about very well there. Who is it going to take to actually bring forward these fees for service? It really does take all of us within this value chain and looking at where the value chain is integrated. It's a true value chain analysis to really see where the points are that you can enter in different fee for services?

And the big question at the end of the day is: "How do I pay for all of this?" Really, "How do I pay?" And this comes back to what we talked about earlier, which is: If you're in a cooperative, if you're in a group, you can guarantee one another's loans. You can pool your savings to do village savings and loans. That's where you access the financing, at least to get started. If you don't have that ability, then it's very difficult.

And one thing that we've seen happen recently is that financial institutions do understand their return on investment as well. They understand that if they teach financial literacy and they understand that if they explain how lending works, their rates are going to increase on their repayments. And so, most of the

partners that we work with, it's set out from the very beginning that they provide that support. It's not the NGO that provides that support. What we do is: We provide the financial institution additional information in how to create the curriculum and how to deliver it. They are simply the ones that deliver it, and they deliver it within their own bottom line.

So, here I'll just show you quickly a few photos. On the right hand side, this is the tiller service provision with the animal draft power of the oxen. It's service for a fee, with conservation farming ripping on a farmer's land in Northern Uganda. And on the left hand side, we see a cooperative group digging basins, which is another conservation farming preparation tool, for a farmer who has actually paid for the service. And the farmer is actually learning how to do the conservation farming at the same time. So, all of this is optimizing the yields for the farmer.

Now, in West Africa, within a USAID Feed the Future Yaajeende project based in Senegal, we've had success with a package for conservation agriculture. And we've used community-based service providers – again, the same sort of idea we had in Uganda – to sell a branded package to farmers. And this package includes conservation agriculture ripping services for one hectare. Now, this can either be with a tractor or with animal draft power – animal draft power for the smaller holding sizes, or a tractor if many cooperative members actually come together and bring their land together to be ripped.

Now, in this package, these providers who are providing the ripping services are actually providing the information, the dissemination on how to provide the land for conservation agriculture, and then how to utilize the inputs and how to maintain it to optimizing the results. So, that extension piece, that training piece is right in there. They provide in this package improved certified seeds, the fertilizer, and the composted organic matter – so, everything that's needed for one hectare of conservation agriculture land is included in the package. But the most important is that there's an insurance provider that provides 100% insurance coverage, so there literally is zero risk if there are any crop losses.

Now, these packages are financed by microfinance institutions. There's no risk due to the insurance coverage. And there's a reduced cost because they're buying in volumes of inputs; they're selling volumes of packages. Farmers are seeing up to four times the amount of yield increases. Just in 2014 – and this is the first year that we've been trying this package in Senegal – there's 3,188 producers who applied these zero-risk technologies through this package. Okay? They paid about \$180.00 USD for sorghum and millet packet, and about \$240.00 for the hybrid corn. They received their extension information through buying this package because they were trained through this package in how to get optimum results.

Now, these are just some examples of how to provide extension service through fee for services. This is either by embedding the cost into the product or service that you're offering or allowing a farmer who is part of a group or a cooperative to access the financing that's needed.

So, as you can see, farmers are willing to receive the information if they are understanding the goal of what they are using it for. And so, when it's embedded, we have found that it's actually much more results-driven in terms of a farmer is able to remember it and use the technology, because they're moving forward with it at the same time.

Now, this here is a flier that we used to promote the "risk zero" product in Senegal. It sold locally. It's supported locally by a local insurance company. And it's financed by local microfinance institutions. Everything is embedded into the service and product costs. And again, that's why we're seeing real results within this business thinking.

So, with this, I'd like to turn it back over to Shaun to discuss further on business thinking in terms of extension.

Shaun Ferris:

Thanks, Gretchen. As you can see, there's a very lively debate on the chat room. Lots of questions being asked. I'm just going to go through a few slides now as we can get to the conclusions. And I think a key point in the discussion coming out of what Gretchen has said is that there is this transition that you'll see from the ideas of extension providing people with support and production – and I think we're getting good at that – but also, this idea of increasingly providing links to different service providers working towards much more business support to the farming community.

And there was a really interesting study done by a company called ECOM looking at coffee production in Ghana where they provided support in three different ways. They provided production support to one set of farmers, business and production support to another set of farmers, and only business to a third set of farmers. And what they found through this analysis was that, actually, the farmers that gained the most were the ones that had the business support. And that kind of really got them thinking about how they can tailor their support to their farmers more effectively.

And I think that's one of the things that we really need to be embedding very clearly in a lot of the thinking that we're doing in extension, is providing people with the information to see the value of investment, to seeing the value of working together as a team, but really seeing: What is the business process that people are involved with?

Now, one of the things that we're testing in Malawi in one of the Food for Peace projects is: How can we start to deliver services to the farming community at a

fee? And I think this gets to this point about scale. You can only go so far with a certain amount of project-funded support. And I think if we're going to provide extension and reduce the number of field agents to farmer numbers, we've got to find systems where we can start to provide separate services or different types of service to farmers at a fee. We're seeing that the financial services sector is already being successful in this area. There's a lot of work that's shown that savings and loans now is a process that can be provided at a fee. People are looking to see if they can get financial education at a fee, and that is attracting a lot of banks into that sector. And then, the issue of: Can we start to provide farmers with business support? And I think as that process starts to gain ground you will see that the banking sector and other people will start to see the merit of providing advice, reducing risk, and providing support to farmers to get into stronger trading relationship processes.

So, this idea of financing risk in business, I think, is a key part of the future process. And I think a takeaway point from this talk, really, is this shift from free to fees. And I think a lot of people do feel that smallholder farmers are not able to pay for these services. I think there is increasing evidence that if it does support their bottom line and they do see the value in that process, they are willing to pay for those types of services. Now, there are going to be some services which you cannot privatize. But I think that much more emphasis needs to be put on scaling those services which you can provide at a fee.

And then, just looking at this idea of scale – again, I think a lot of the work that we have been doing in the past has been very based around communities. And I think we do have to be looking much more systematically about how we can start to gather information and share it so you get a broader understanding of particular areas and a better understanding of how value chains cross through different communities. And this means that different types of extension services are going to have to talk to each other more effectively, share information more effectively so that people can start to work at a higher level with this kind of approach.

And I think one of the factors that's going to enable this to happen is this massive shift in the ability of people to share information through various forms of mobile technologies and ICT support tools. I do think that if we understand the idea of segmented farmers, segmented markets, we can start to use information tools to profile farmers much more effectively, and then we can provide services to those farmers in a more tailored way. And I think ICT is going to be one of the key ways that complements face-to-face support but helps us to link more farmers with local service providers.

I think the other thing that we're seeing is when you're talking to large government extension teams, is that it's quite difficult for them to manage messaging, and to run campaigns, and to work in a really coordinated manner.

And from our discussions with – certainly with agencies like in Malawi, we've been working extensively with the Kenyan extension services, and they are looking for ICT tools to help them provide a much more coordinated management process. And again, so that they can help link farmers to specific types of markets, inputs, and then these newly emerging business and financial service providers. So, that's going to be a critical part of the future.

And just to sort of conclude from the NGO side before I hand over to Andrea is to say that there are lots of different players in the extension system. But I think that successful extension services are not going to emerge passively. It's not going to come together unless we start to work much more – in a much more coordinated fashion across these different public, civil, and private sector agencies. There are many players out there. And I think we also need to be looking at new types of players, whether those are locally employed people, local entrepreneurs, local ICT companies that can help us to sort of glue together these different partners.

I think it's going to require also a lot of leadership from the countries themselves in terms of how they will modernize their extension services. And I think that there is an increasing appetite for government services to start to work in ways that supports their means of operations. And I think there's a real opportunity for us to work alongside the management of those extension services to support them in this process of modernization. And I think that does mean introducing more business intelligence into the work that they're doing, bringing in this idea of paid services, looking at how we can reduce costs, and also phase out a lot of the areas of free – which farmers, I think, have grown to expect – which in the end may not be helping the mass of farmers.

I think we've got to get much better at integrating information and ideas. And I think this idea of certain players providing or generating market information has to be really effectively linked with field agents on the ground who are using them and adding value to that kind of information. And I think the area that is – still needs a lot of support, I think, is how we bring in more financial services to the value chain work that's been developed over the last 10 to 15 years, and how we can integrate that value chain thinking into the local and national systems. And with that, I'm going to hand over to Andrea.

Andrea Bohn:

Okay, thanks a lot. So, coming back to some observations that the MEAS program has made – and this actually echoes some of the comments that I've been seeing in the chat box.

We talked about pluralism, but really, a system with the government. There's many players, but are they acting as partners? There's definitely issues of coordination, collaboration, and challenges, because a lot of what we see happening – including innovative approaches – is really happening under the

framework of projects. And there's a real projectization of development that has its advantages, but lots of disadvantages as well.

And working with smallholder farmers is often a political issue. And I don't want to go into the details in that, but let's just keep in mind that a lot of the things you see happening on the ground may not be driven by rationale and objectively trying to make things better for people who are typically marginalized, but there's a huge political dimension to this as well.

Definitely, I would say the farmer voice is still very weak – too very weak in many places. And there is – the links between research and extension are broken, but also there is broken links between needs of farmers, needs of the community, budgeting – whether it's the private sector or the public sector – and actually measuring performance.

Presenting our challenges in terms of financial sustainability: We've had quite a bit of discussion on the side in terms of insurance, how we're going to make that work. Definitely both in projects as well as in public sector extension, the recurrent cost problem: People are not thinking long-term. And it may at times be better to have fewer staff but be able to provide them with the resources that they need to be effective.

Performance issues in the public sector especially – and this has a lot to do with management challenges and lack of dependable funding for years to come – gender imbalances in staffing and programming in many providers. We still see too much of a focus on production support and less on agriculture as a business. The human institutional capacity building needs are immense. And again, this is for many actors that we've talked about today, not just the public sector. And I know some of you were expecting to hear a lot more about ICT during this presentation, but as it evolved we wanted to put more of an emphasis on the market orientation and models that actually move towards the fee-based system.

What I can say is there's definitely lots of exciting initiatives out there, but we're still grappling with what is really effective. What are the kinds of services disseminated through ICT, made accessible through ICT, that are actually leading to change at the farm level and among other actors in the value chain? Lots and lots of examples where this is happening at a small scale, but how can it be scaled up and out? And how can it be sustained for a long period of time?

And I'm going to skip over this one here. You will have an updated slide deck. The key point I want to make in terms of conclusions is: Pluralism, yes. But definitely a need for clearer roles in coordination, quality controls, and thinking of ways to strengthen the overall agricultural innovation system. And that includes agricultural research and education and training. A need to work harder to identify successes and strengths in extension and build on them. A need to

explore more public-private partnerships. Options for performance contracting in extension. Third-party certification of skills.

And let me close with a key statement. And again, I'm very happy to have seen this in the chat box as well. There's a need for more direct input and control by farmers of extension services. Plan *with* and not *for* the farmers.

And with that, I'd actually like to hand over to the question session.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Julie MacCartee: Great. Thank you so much, Andrea, Shaun, and Gretchen. This is a really wonderful presentation and we have had some very rich discussion in the chat box. To all of you who have been typing, thank you very much for your questions and comments. We will pose as many as we can to the presenters in the next 25 minutes. If we are unable to get to your question, please feel free to restate it at the end of the chat box so that it's kind of fresh in our view. We've tried to collect as many as we could. But we'll also follow up with the presenters with – and show them the entire slate of questions that were entered in the chat box today in the hopes that we can do some follow up and get answers for you all.

All right. So, we had a lot of specific questions for Gretchen during your portion of the webinar. And so, I thought I might start by posing a couple of those. First up, Caroline Fowler asked, "Have the commissions that the agents are receiving been contentious at all? I've heard that in other projects it's been difficult to make commissions high enough for the agents to survive off of financially, due to low margins on many input products."

So, that's one question for you, and I thought I would just maybe pose two to have in your wheelhouse. Rupert Best with CRS in Bogotá, Colombia asked, "Do we know how many farmers in developing countries are organized into functioning co-ops? Are they among the 5% that Shaun mentioned – consistent market sales – or do they reach further down the pathway?"

Do you have a figure on the investment required to build a strong co-op? I'm not sure if those are... yes. And how many farmers in countries are organized into functioning co-ops? How common are they? What percentage?

Gretchen Villegas: Okay. Good questions. Thank you very much for that. In terms of commissions, again it goes back to volume. So, depending on the volumes that they can sell will depend on the commissions that they'll make. What we do is: We sit with the agro input companies and the agents, and we basically do some cash flows and some business modeling between them so that they can understand each other very well in terms of basically what volumes need to be sold in order to make a living on commission.

And so, by doing that I think it's very helpful in terms of letting them understand as a community-based provider: How much would they have to have to sell in order to make an income for the month? And that's really a combination of services and products being sold. What really plays in well to what we've done and what I've seen differently from other programs is when we equip community-based service providers with information that they can provide as training to the farmer they will sell much more. And that's where you'll really see the difference. So, so far we have, I would say, I think we have about 1,500 in Uganda selling this way, and they're making much more money than they had doing their own farming business. So, it is working.

In terms of cooperatives, that depends on the country. In certain countries there is still a push towards an enabling environment for cooperatives. And in other countries it's more questionable in terms of the governments promoting cooperative development. We have seen a resurgence of the cooperative movement, especially within Eastern and Southern Africa in the recent five to 10 years. We are still looking at between probably about a 10% to 15% of smallholder farmers being in the cooperatives, but they're growing. They're growing every day. And you'll see that organizations that work in international development tend to – are now working much more closely with groups of farmers because, again, they can access them for training. Microfinance institutions can access them for lending.

To set up a cooperative, basically you need to go through the country's cooperative law. So, it's mobilizing, organizing yourselves, and then it's doing a constitution, registering, and then moving forward with that. So, in terms of cost, the real cost is creating the enabling environment. And then, it's actually the human capital of putting that cooperative tomorrow, much more so than actually financial cost.

Julie MacCartee:

And a good question came in from Gary Alex at USAID that I think would be one that all of you could address – or any of you. “Many of these services work with small farmers while donors and NGO projects are there. What are the key needs to change the systems to work better without the ongoing external aid? Is it in training technical staff of various agencies? Strengthening producer organizations? Reform of policy extensions? Strengthening private sector actors? Or all of the above?”

And I think there's a – this is – a few people were mentioning sustainability as well.

Shaun Ferris:

Great question, Gary. So, I think that – there's a – my sense is that there's a lot of progress being made in areas where farmers are starting to come together to look at specific products and link to markets. And that is drawing in a lot of

service providers, and that is slowly building a stronger ecosystem around them. And that is all that kind of virtuous cycle process. I think that this idea of “How can we strengthen the progress of farmers who have received more intensive report?” – one of the ways of doing this, I think, is to really take a strong look at how we privatize some of the services that come through a traditional project approach.

And I think, again, what we’ve seen in the microfinance world is this ability to make a shift over the last four to five years from free service providers into stabilized fee for service providers in the microfinance world. And I think that’s made a lot of people step back and say, “Well, can we replicate that in other areas.” And when you start to look at the systems you can see, as Gretchen said, when you bring in input service providers that have commission agents that link farmers to the right inputs, that are supporting the right kind of production systems, I think that that becomes a more sustainable access to those types of input markets.

This whole area of cooperative development, I think, is very important. And I think that where we’ve seen strong cooperatives – and I think Malawi is a good example – you’re starting to see them offer commercial services to farmers. And what I see is that we will gradually track towards veterinary services being more privatized, irrigation services being privatized, tillage services being privatized. And you’re slowly going to sort of take bites away from what has traditionally been all a free process available to some. And my sense is that it’ll be this combination of bringing in as much fee for service areas that will provide greater sustainability in a lot of production and marketing areas, and then we complement that with things that are not so easy to privatize. And I think that is going to help us a lot with the sustainability process.

Gretchen Villegas: And just one quick comment – this is Gretchen – to add on there. With the private sector it has to do with the return on investment. So, if our role as facilitators in the field is just to show private sector and to show those who are filling those economic – those gaps within the value chain what the return on investment is for all parties and have them clearly show that, then I think it will work. Everything that Shaun’s saying will work.

Julie MacCartee: Andrea, do you have any final comments? Or are you taking care of it in the chat box at the moment on that question?

Andrea Bohn: Mm hmm.

Julie MacCartee: Great. Thank you for attending to the chat box.

Gretchen Villegas: Good job!

Julie MacCartee: All right. I saw a question for Shaun, just a quick question from Elon Gilbert. “How well are community knowledge workers and the like providing the information listed in your presentation?”

Shaun Ferris: Hi, Elon. Thanks very much for the question. I think with a lot of these community knowledge workers and people that are providing different types of information services we are still at the point of piloting and testing ideas. My understanding at the moment is that we’re still not at a stage where a lot of those services are commercially viable yet. However, I think as ICT systems really embed themselves in communities and as we start to get more efficient service providers that are providing the right types of information to nodes within communications, I think that ability to share knowledge and to build out those services will only grow.

And I think if you look at sort of what is the situation where you have farmers in – well, let’s say Europe or the United States – they have huge access to information. But they also have access to a lot of people who sort, select, and provide people with the information they can actually act on. And so, I do think that it’s not just a question of connectivity here. We can all be deluged with information, but it’s the ability of people to be able to synthesize that information and provide the right information to people which I think is going to be effective in the future.

And how far away is that future? I don’t think it is that far away. And so, I would think in the next four to five years you’re going to be seeing people much closer to the farmer, whether they’re in extension services or just information providers who can package information, link people, and make a commission basis on that.

Julie MacCartee: Great. Thank you for that response. Gretchen, there was a question from Anita Champion, who was interested in your Uganda example and asked, “Can Gretchen provide more detail on how much the farmer training costs – the embedded part? And is there a concern for building competition by training other farmers to be TSPs?”

Gretchen Villegas: The last part was what?

Julie MacCartee: “Is there a concern for building competition by training other farmers to be TSPs?”

Gretchen Villegas: Okay. Yeah, very good question. We are working with 60,000 smallholder farmers in the area of Northern Uganda, of which we’re estimating we have at least 200,000 smallholder farmers in that area to work with. We were able to initially train only 500 farmers to be tiller service providers. So, if you have 500 farmers trained as tiller service providers – we’ve already trained 60,000 in

conservation farming. We have the potential to train out 200,000 with the private sector partner. At this point in time? No. There's no issue with creating competition.

What we did need to do, though, was to – and this is a really good question – is to think very clearly on how to make sure we were reaching the depths of all 13 districts. And so, we did have to do some work with the agro input companies to make sure that we had trainings available and we could actually mobilize farmers to go from one district to the other.

Julie MacCartee:

Great. Thank you. And I thought I would point out that we had – there was a nice conversation going on in the chat box about the concerns of side selling. And so, I thought perhaps you all might want to chime in. And it branched off of a concern that Richard Tinsley mentioned, where in some cases farmers might only market through a cooperative what was needed to repay their loans and then side sell the rest. And there was some conversation about a need for smallholder education on how markets work and who benefits where in the value chain before they understand the value and security of contracts versus the insecurity but initial gains of side selling. I didn't know if you wanted to comment related to your presentation.

Gretchen Villegas:

It's true. It can happen. And I think it does happen. So, I think we just need to lay it out on the table that reality is there is side selling that takes place – for various reasons. I want to take you back for a moment for the first slide I started with, and it's really the seven cooperative principles. When working with groups, really whether they're co-ops or associations or farmer clubs or whatnot, if you use these seven cooperative principles and really build a community of people who really believe in what they're doing, they're making their own decisions, it curbs that as much as possible. Because people really are working for the good of the community and the good of their group.

So, that's really what we go back to at the National Cooperative Business Association in order to do cooperative business. And it's really the seven cooperative principles just ingrained in everything that we do. But it's also looking at the farmer member services. If the farmer member services are not built out in a way where people truly believe that they are benefiting from being a member, then that is where you have a breakdown and there is more of that side selling taking place, because the farmers do not really feel like they own this organization or this cooperative. So, you have to build out those farmer services. If you don't, it's inevitable that it's going to happen.

But what I can tell you is that cooperatives can be very, very successful if they're grounded properly. And I think as facilitators, again, that's our role.

Julie MacCartee:

All right. We have a question from Christoph Pannhausen – it might be a bit of a large question, but: “Do you have methods and approaches to address the political economy aspect of agricultural extensions?”

Shaun Ferris:

That’s a biggie. And Andrea may be able to help us with this. What I do think in some ways is that there has been, let’s say, over a long-term, the last 20 years, I think there has been a bit of divergence in the sense that you have the government extension doing one type of thing, we have the civil society really taking on a different type of extension approach, and then we have the private sector really focusing on the, I guess, the higher value, more specialized areas.

And my sense – and maybe I’m just a huge optimist, but my sense is that there is much greater appetite from all of those players now to see the value of what each other can bring to the table. And I think if we looked at this perhaps 10 years ago that wasn’t quite as clear. So, what I’m seeing is that government extension agents are looking at some very successful civil society projects and approaches and seeing how they can integrate that into their services.

I think at the same time civil society is looking at the long-term steady progress that is being made by government extension services in things like climate-smart agriculture, conservation agriculture, and improved farming systems. And we need to integrate that more effectively into the work that we’re doing. And I think both of those parties are also seeing the huge role that the private sector can say.

So, my sense is there’s a much greater appetite for better coordination – but not enforced coordination. I mean, bringing people to the table that each add value. And I think there are ways in which we can capitalize that more effectively, and I do think that projects like MEAS have started to explore and delve into some things. And I think that type of project does start to highlight where there are opportunities to bring these different actors together in a more effective manner, and I think that that’s a really good investment of development funding.

Julie MacCartee:

And I did notice that Andrea posted in the chat box that there are several good publications on political economy issues in the ag sector at large at the Future Agriculture Consortium. And she provided the link there in the chat box.

All right. Let’s see... We’ve got lots of good questions here, so just kind of sorting through some of these... A quick question from Kristy Cook: “How many farmers have been involved in ‘Risk Zero?’ It sounds as if it would work on a small scale, but how about on a larger scale?” Yeah, that’s for Gretchen.

Gretchen Villegas:

Yeah, so far in 2014, which is the first year in which we've rolled out this package, it's been – I believe it's 3,188 that have taken advantage of this package and are seeing results already. The plan is to keep rolling it out and keep it available for larger numbers. Again, it's in a pilot stage right now, so we'll wait and see how that can be seen.

But again, just don't lose sight of the fact that we're working with groups and cooperatives and they can finance this through the fact that they have each other to guarantee their loans, or they have access to their village savings and loans associations – which sometimes have enough funding and sometimes don't. But if you were looking at this package for individual smallholder farmers, it would not work. And it would not be scalable by any means. So...

Shaun Ferris:

I think – just to add on to this cooperative discussion also, though – and Richard has made several comments on this throughout the chat box – it's not to say that this is easy to do. And it's not to say that there are still not lots of challenges in this process. There are certainly certain types of farmers and certain value chains where being an individual – it just makes more sense. And I think we just have to be clear about that.

But when it comes to supporting the mass of poor farmers, I think that if those people try to succeed financially as an individual, there's not a lot of evidence that they can be very successful in that way. So, despite many of the challenges, I think that the cooperative model has over the centuries shown that it can be a very effective model when it has good management and clear business sights.

There are other approaches that aggregate input supply processes. There are other models which aggregate or bring together traders to support certain value chains. So, there are many other types of models out there. And I think the sort of intermediary firm-led approach is another process which is building out a business model, if you like, which is encouraging aggregation to them. So, there are different models of doing this, but I think that the cooperative model has in many, many value chains showed huge merit in providing farmers with consistent support across their production systems.

Julie MacCartee:

Thank you, Shaun. We have time for a couple more questions, but just for those of you who are thinking about dropping off a bit early, please do take a moment to take the polls that you'll see on your screen. Those help us shape our Ag Sector Council seminars for the future and make them more useful to you.

All right. So, we had a question from Christen Malaidza, who is with the Ministry of Agriculture in Malawi but is actually doing graduate studies currently at the University of Tsukuba in Japan. So, quite the globe trekker. "From your studies, how has ICT and extension supported the strengthening of farmer

organizations? Farmer organizations are generally weak in most subterranean African countries.”

Shaun Ferris:

Okay. How has ICT supported cooperatives? Right. Okay. I think at the moment what we’re seeing in terms of ICT usage – well, a few different things. I think that ICT is starting to provide people with a means of analyzing – or, gathering and analyzing data in a much faster time frame. And that alone provides people with a much greater opportunity to make decisions during the season rather than analyzing things at the end of the season.

I think this ability of cooperatives to be able to profile, have records of their farmers is going to be a very important process. And you’re seeing this type of things in the higher value products first – as you would expect – but, for example, coffee farmers where the cooperatives know land size aspects, altitudes, and the cupping quality of their particular farmers, and then they can link those farmers or they can link particular quality productions to different types of market buyers. And that kind of optimizes sales, if you like.

I think when it comes to extension services, you’re seeing that ICT is being applied in a simple way at first in terms of being able to track where field agents are working with specific farmers and what types of services that they’re providing. The Chinese government has recently rolled out a very large program to the extension services there. And their ability to map and track extension services they have said has been one of the major steps forward that they have made in the last 20 or 30 years.

And I think the other side of this is when we’re starting to ask field agents or cooperatives to provide more business intelligence to the farming community. You really need some tools to help people do the analysis in the field or at the stations so that they can start to gather data, synthesize it, and provide valuable business information back to farmers. And I think that is going to be where we are going to see a lot more support to farmers in the future, helping them with their business approaches.

Julie MacCartee:

Thank you. Well, we’re at our wrap-up point now. I thought I might ask for just a final comment. Fernando Manzo Ramos from Mexico had expressed a concern that given the differences in farm resources, size, needs, expectations, strategies, objectives – all very different – if you could just give your final comment on how extension can properly serve all these different types of farmers? Your takeaway message in that regard?

Shaun Ferris:

So, yeah, great question. And I think from the chat box you’ve also seen that this is not an easy process. It’s a very challenging area. It does take a lot of time also to bring people from a situation of very poor coordination, weak links to market, and very little use of technology to a situation where they’re really starting to

optimize their production systems and have strong links to market. That process is complicated.

And I think that – having looked across all these spectrums of things – I think an important message to say is that “one size doesn’t fit all,” that we need tailored services for these different types of farming systems that we’re working in. I think there’s a huge gap in the area of financing, and that’s something that I think as an industry we need to focus on much more effectively. And I think providing better systems to share information and be able to make decisions on information is going to be key to being successful at scale in the future.

Julie MacCartee: And one quick comment from Gretchen and then we’ll wrap up.

Gretchen Villegas: You are right in terms of stating that all country contexts are very different – and the value chains as well. I would suggest you look at whatever value chain you’re looking to assist with wherever you are. Analyze it in a way of looking at where those gap areas are, and then figure out how you can integrate the private sectors, as Andrea was talking about there at the end there. The private sector needs to understand their return on investment and how to integrate well with government and the other education institutions as well.

But it’s true: Every single situation will be differently. All we can do is give you the ideas of how we’ve looked at it in some different contexts and situations. And then, you can take some of these tools and some of these ideas and apply them to your situation.

Julie MacCartee: Thank you so much to Gretchen, Shaun, and Andrea, and to the Knowledge-Driven Agricultural Management mechanism, which always provides unwavering and excellent support and management of the Ag Sector Council seminar series.

And most importantly, thank you to you, our attendees. You are the reason that we continue to hold this seminar series, and we hope to see you at future webinars. So, thank you very much and we’ll see you next time.

[End of Audio]