

*In the context of PAN UK's Food and Fairness project exploring issues for African smallholders in horticulture, we review three recent books on impacts on and options for smallholders in developing countries in modern food supply chains*

## Farm to market – a guide for African smallholders

This is a wonderfully helpful book relevant for farmer associations and all those working with small-scale farmers in developing countries. It is written in simple language and accessible style and lay-out, offering clear, practical guidance for people who have no formal background in marketing issues. It aims to show how farmers can organise to gain a better deal from supply chains, local or export, through a value chain analysis. It does this in a lively manner, illustrated through 19 case studies of smallholder associations' experiences, ranging from pineapples in Ghana, cashew in Mozambique, mango, dairy and honey in Kenya to sunflower and coffee in Tanzania and sheanut butter in Mali. It describes how farmers can map and assess opportunities and markets, and plan to upgrade their produce, develop chain partnerships, add value by processing and marketing, or develop co-ownership. What is especially useful is the information from the case studies on failures and difficulties, how long it may take to improve farmers' position in the chain and what kind of external support, from NGOs or private companies, is most appropriate at different stages.

*Chain Empowerment* makes no mention of pesticide issues or crop management but it will be an invaluable resource and training tool for farmers trained in organic and IPM methods to plan how to improve marketing of their produce. A French translation would be welcome to enable more farmer groups and NGOs in West Africa to make use of this excellent guide.

*Chain empowerment. Supporting African farmers to develop markets. Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam; Faïda Market Link, Arusha; and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Nairobi, 2006.*

## Globalisation of food – the pros and cons for small-scale producers

This book gives a detailed and academic exploration of issues in today's global food chains, not only in export production but also looking at changes in retail supply chains in developing countries. It starts with two useful overview chapters and a case study on fish products from developing countries and food standard compliance, followed by in-depth economic analysis of changing structures in supply chains and who benefits and who loses out. Eleven country case studies report on trends and impacts in China, India, Central America, Madagascar and Senegal, as well as eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, focus-

ing on how small farmers, farm workers and small traders have been affected, positively and negatively. The final section looks at policy implications, building capacity for compliance with evolving food safety and health standards and public sector initiatives to facilitate small farmer access via marketing initiatives.

Compliance with pesticide requirements (residue levels, handling and spraying practice) is not mentioned in detail in most chapters but there are some interesting nuggets. The Central America cases from Guatemala and Nicaragua reveals that small and medium growers producing for national supermarkets use more agrochemical inputs than those selling into traditional 'wet' markets, partly due to higher credit and technical assistance. The authors note the highly chemical-intensive production in the region, with Costa Rica having one of the world's highest rates of stomach cancer, attributed to the levels of pesticide use. While food chain concerns in European export markets are now working to reduce use of hazardous pesticides, the modern, urban retail market in Central America has yet to demand similar practices. In contrast, the Madagascar case describes the activities of Lecofruit, which buys vegetables from over 9,000 smallholders, for the European export market. Pesticide application is strictly monitored to make sure produce complies with maximum residue requirements, through 300 extension agents working with 1,500 farmer assistants. The company has introduced compost making and other crop improvement and quality controls, which have had positive spin-offs for rice and other crops grown by the farmers for local markets.

This book challenges some assumptions that smallholders always lose out in export chains. It shows that generalisations can be widely off the mark and that each case warrants careful analysis.

*Global supply chains, standards and the poor: How the globalization of food systems and standards affects rural development and poverty. Ed. J Swinnen, CAB International, Wallingford, 2007.*

## Small-scale producers in modern supermarket supply chains

This book pulls together findings from 16 case studies, coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development, looking at how smallholder farmers are affected by today's rapid change in food retail in developing and transition countries. It compares three stages of supermarket penetration: newly emerging supply chains (Indian subcontinent and Africa); transition from state control (Eastern Europe, China and Vietnam) and consolidation and expansion (Latin America, South-

East Asia and South Africa). The cases cover mainly fresh fruit and vegetables and dairy supply chains and show a wide variety of retail situations, some with transnational and others with national and regional supermarket companies. The factors affecting smallholder exclusion or inclusion are explored. The case studies provide useful detail of how the 'four pillars' of retail structural change play out in different countries: the shift to centralised purchasing; the emergence of specialised wholesalers and logistics firms; the use of preferred suppliers; and the development of private standards on food quality and safety.

Smallholders often face problems in meeting the volume, consistency, quality and food safety requirements of modern retailers, as well as difficulties with logistics, services and risk. However, smallholders can offer comparative advantages in supply chains, particularly in labour-intensive horticulture crops, compared with large-scale producers. The domestic supermarket TOPS in Thailand found that small producers are better able to produce organic fruit and vegetables since they traditionally use compatible practices of crop rotation and pest-resistant varieties, while in Zimbabwe smallholders' high commitment achieved lower rejection rates for baby corn than large estates trying to grow non-traditional vegetables. Food poisoning incidents in Vietnam due to high levels of pesticide residues in the mid 1990s led to government-supported initiatives to grow safe, healthy vegetables, with five 'hygiene vegetable' farmer co-operatives set up after training. These farmers are now selling high quality organic produce to a range of domestic and export market companies and directly to customers.

The cross-cutting conclusion from the case studies is that supermarkets and multinational food companies are driving rapid structural change in farming and food supply, yet this is poorly understood by policy makers, farmer associations or much of the development community. In turn, these companies often lack an understanding of the impact they have on local markets or a clear strategy for including smallholders. The authors make recommendations for different stakeholders for supporting smallholders to anticipate and adjust to dynamic retail changes. These include more government and donor attention to upgrading quality and services in traditional 'wet' markets, which buy produce from many smallholders, and building the capacity of farmer organisations to consolidate volumes of produce supplied and improve their quality, logistics and managerial expertise.

*Regoverning markets. A place for small-scale producers in modern agrifood chains? B Vorley, A Fearne and D Ray (Eds.), Gower Publishing, Aldershot.*