

Identifying potential adopters of an agricultural innovation

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Summary

The return to public investment in agricultural research depends, in part, on the extent to which primary producers adopt the products of that research. Thus, maximising the return to investment in agricultural research involves identifying what research products are likely to be adopted by primary producers and by how many, and determining what processes are required to ensure the diffusion of research products among producers is as rapid as possible. In effect, adoption can be better targeted by identifying the relevant population of potential adopters and determining what processes will accelerate diffusion through that population. In this chapter, a method for identifying the population of potential adopters of an agricultural innovation is described. In essence, it is a process for discovering how agricultural innovations contribute to satisfying the needs of managers of agricultural enterprises. The method allows the population of potential adopters to be classified into benefit segments on the basis that producers with different farm contexts obtain different benefits from an innovation. The method is illustrated by application to a case study in horticulture. The fit of the method with the major paradigms in agricultural extension is discussed.

Introduction

We describe a theoretical framework for discovering how agricultural innovations contribute to satisfying the needs of primary producers as managers of agricultural enterprises. The framework draws on consumer behaviour theory and farming systems theory. It is based on the assumption that the adoption of agricultural innovations is a critically important decision for producers, and on the hypothesis that the benefits to be had from adopting an agricultural innovation are influenced by particular elements in farming systems that are specific to each innovation. The theoretical framework provided the basis for us to develop a method for properly specifying the population of potential adopters of agricultural innovations. The method allows the population of potential adopters to be classified into market segments on the basis that producers with different farm contexts obtain different benefits from an agricultural innovation.