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Identifying and targeting adoption drivers

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Summary

Information and learning are often the primary tools available for influencing practice change. In this chapter, the role of information and learning in landholder adoption decisions is explored with a view to providing a pathway for more effective extension planning and delivery. Where potential adopters are found to hold perceptions that differ from those held by comparable users of a practice, there is the potential for learning. Where those perceptions are also associated with a greater likelihood of adoption, extension that promotes that learning is likely to lead to more rapid and better-informed adoption decisions. Steps and examples are presented that show an approach to identifying perceptions that are influential in the adoption decision and have the potential to be targeted effectively.

Introduction

Many projects aim for extensive adoption and practice change, often within a very short period of time. Large amounts of public and private funding are spent on these projects which are usually only achieved by influencing a large number of independent adoption decisions among a highly diverse population of individual decision makers. Often, particularly in larger projects, not much is known about the individual decision makers who will determine whether the practice change targets are going to be met. Further, most projects only ever have personal contact with a small proportion of the potential adopters who will ultimately determine whether the project succeeds or fails.

Adding to the challenge, the tools available for a typical project to influence practice change by rural landholders are usually limited to those involving information and learning. The carrots and sticks of incentives and legislation are rarely at hand. Given the many diverse sources of information for farmers, a single project is only ever destined to be a bit-player in delivering information and promoting learning of the relative merits of adopting a particular practice (see Barr, Chapter 9 of this volume).

This chapter looks at ways to understand adoption decisions for particular innovations so that the most likely opportunities to assist decision making and influence adoption decisions can be identified and targeted. To do this requires a level of confidence so that at least some of the main factors influencing a substantial proportion of adoption decisions, or future adoption