The impacts of COVID-19 on farmers in Uganda during 2020: Central, Eastern, and Western Regions

We interviewed 985 farmers in Central, Eastern, and Western Uganda about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their livelihoods and wellbeing. In the Eastern region, 171 subsistence-oriented farmers were interviewed in July to August 2020; in the Western region 126 large-scale cattle farmers were interviewed in September to October 2020; and in the Central region 688 small-scale commercial mixed farmers were interviewed in December 2020.

Over two-thirds of households reported reduced incomes, often reduced by half or more. Both farm sales and off-farm work were impacted. About a quarter of households had to reduce the amount or diversity of food eaten. Food security impacts were more severe for poorer households, particularly in the Eastern region.

As the pandemic continues, it is increasingly important to support the rural poor. Restrictions which better balance public health and economic impacts, the stabilisation of market prices for both sales of farm produce and purchase of foodstuffs, and direct aid are all recommended.

Outcomes

- 67% lost income due to reduced farm sales and off-farm work.
- 18% ate less food due to reduced access to markets.
- 24% ate less diverse food due to reduced mobility.
- 8% were aware of COVID-19 cases.
- 50% of households could not sell farm produce due to lack of access to buyers and markets.
- 34% could sell but at low prices, and 20% said there was reduced demand.
- 30% of households reported decreased off-farm incomes due to mobility restrictions.
- 22% lacked work opportunities.
- 28% of households had difficulty purchasing foods. This was mainly due to a lack of transport options (20%), a lack of money (17%), or high sale prices of foodstuffs (16%).
- 63% of households had to deploy coping strategies.
- Common strategies were: 38% depleted savings, 22% sold livestock, 16% incurred debts they were not confident they could pay back.

By December 2020, many households had not recovered:

- 22% still had to apply coping strategies.
- 31% still had lower incomes than usual.
- 6% were still consuming less food and/or less diverse food than usual.
- The households more deeply impacted were slower to recover - sucked into a poverty trap?

* The data on recovery was collected only in Central Uganda.
Comparison of impacts in the Central, Eastern and Western Regions

### Western Region
- **% who lost income lost from:**
  - Field Crops: 37%
  - Animal Sales: 46%
  - Milk: 53%
  - Off Farm: 32%
- **Severity of COVID Impacts**
  - Mobility: Mild
  - Food Markets: Moderate
  - Farm Inputs: Moderate
  - Farm Labour: Severe
  - Farm Income: Severe
  - Off Farm Income: Severe
- **% of respondents lost income lost from:**
  - Field Crops: 53%
  - Animal Sales: 44%
  - Milk: 11%
  - Off Farm: 11%
- **Reduced amount or diversity of foods eaten:**
  - 90%
  - 1%

### Central Region
- **% who lost income lost from:**
  - Field Crops: 20%
  - Animal Sales: 14%
  - Off Farm: 40%
- **Severity of COVID Impacts**
  - Mobility: Mild
  - Food Markets: Moderate
  - Farm Inputs: Moderate
  - Farm Labour: Severe
  - Farm Income: Severe
  - Off Farm Income: Severe
- **% of respondents lost income lost from:**
  - Field Crops: 44%
  - Animal Sales: 11%
  - Off Farm: 12%
- **Reduced amount or diversity of foods eaten:**
  - 57%
  - 17%

### Eastern Region
- **% who lost income lost from:**
  - Field Crops: 44%
  - Animal Sales: 11%
  - Fruits & Veg.: 11%
  - Off Farm: 64%
- **Severity of COVID Impacts**
  - Mobility: Mild
  - Food Markets: Moderate
  - Farm Inputs: Moderate
  - Farm Labour: Mild
  - Farm Income: Moderate
  - Off Farm Income: Moderate
- **% of respondents lost income lost from:**
  - Field Crops: 92%
  - Animal Sales: 22%
  - Off Farm: 22%
- **Reduced amount or diversity of foods eaten:**
  - 92%
  - 81%

### Farming System
- **Western Region:**
  - Commercial cattle ranching and dairy
    - 73% of produce sold
    - 8.5 $ income per person per day
    - 36.7 ha farm size
    - 48.4 cattle equivalent per household (TLU)
- **Central Region:**
  - Mixed commercial, staple crops, coffee, pigs, chicken
    - 58% of produce sold
    - 2.2 $ income per person per day
    - 1.1 ha farm size
    - 0.6 cattle equivalent per household (TLU)
- **Eastern Region:**
  - Subsistence oriented staple crops
    - 22% of produce sold
    - No data income per person per day
    - 1.0 ha farm size
    - 0.8 cattle equivalent per household (TLU)