The mobile farming revolution in Africa

By Staff Reporter

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For some time now, there has been a growing body of anecdotal evidence to suggest that mobile telephony was having a significant impact on the quality and type of farming that is taking place in Africa. But a recent study conducted by global management consulting, technology and outsourcing services company, Accenture, is providing concrete proof and a deeper understanding of this impact.

Four key areas were highlighted as being of particular importance:

- Improving access to financial services
- Provision of agricultural information
- Improving data visibility for supply chain efficiency
- Enhancing access to markets

These four vital areas will have an incredible global impact, according to the study. They project an increase of around US$138 billion in global agricultural production by 2020. Oxfam also reports that "they could also cut carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 5 mega tonnes (Mt) in these markets and reduce freshwater withdrawals for agricultural irrigation by 6%, with significant savings in water-stressed regions."

Access to mobile phones and the information they provide kicks off a virtuous circle. Access to basic financial services, better markets and info on successful farming techniques will lead to bigger profits which mean better seeds, fertiliser and chemicals, which provide better crop yields and on and on it goes.

In Kenya, farmers can now get access to the daily market prices of various commodities like maize by writing the name of the commodity and sending an SMS to a specified code of the mobile service provider. Simple, but profoundly impactful. The service has spread from Kenya into other countries such as Uganda, Malawi, Ethiopia, Ghana and Nigeria.

And collaborative mobile platforms like M-Farm are also being used by farmers for group purchasing and group selling.

One of the few inhibiting factors for this major change is the rapid deployment of widespread broadband deployment across Africa.

Partnerships between governments and the private sector are going to be critical if this mobile revolution is to reach its full potential in Africa and change farming and the way that we feed the continent forever.

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