

# **Agronomy is...**

**Dave Harris**

**ICRAF, Nairobi, Kenya & Bangor University, UK.**

**Agronomy is what we, as technology developers and promoters, believe is the principal means by which farmers make a living.**

**1. Farming is more than just agronomy.**

- Many more skills required for success.
- Business planning, financial management, marketing, labour management, mechanics, veterinary, etc.

**2. Farming is difficult.**

- In the UK, one to three years to learn all the skills necessary to farm successfully.
- Even then many farms not financially viable without large subsidies.
- 500 million smallholder farms. All have, can acquire or want these skills?

**3. The small farm problem.**

- Small returns (money, value) from small farms and high risk. Poor incentives?
- Improving agronomy might not be at the top of rural households' wish lists for greater wellbeing.
- We assume otherwise.

#### **4. Households are not only farmers.**

- 'Small farmers' as 'rural households'; livelihoods and the wider concept.
- Improved agronomy one amongst competing opportunities for investment of additional resources.
- Improved agronomic technologies should be more attractive in comparison with e.g. off-farm and non-farm employment, education, training, etc.

#### **6. Improved agronomy is useless unless adopted.**

- Likelihood of adoption an inherent property of the technology itself rather than a consequence of the interaction between the technology and the potential adopter's objectives, attitudes and circumstances.
- Possible overestimation of the effectiveness in practice of the agronomic advances that we promote. Some possible reasons are:
  - 'Sunk costs'.
  - Implementing new technologies consistently well on entire farms rather than in research plots.
  - Risks (and exposure to losses) associated with new technologies.

#### **8. What if rural households don't want improved agronomy?**

- If improved agronomy is not in the best interests of rural households is it ethical to continue to promote the adoption of improved agronomy? Are we wasting people's time?

Thank you.