

Farmer Diagnostic Protocol

Guide

PS Baker May 2012

This protocol is designed to help you fill in the farmer diagnostic spread-sheet developed to capture basic farmers' perceptions and information about his/her farm.

Introduction

Introduce yourself to the farmer – tell him/her who you are and why you are here, E.g. something like:

Good morning my name is _____ I work for ... (organisation).

We are a ... (not-for-profit foundation / coffee traders etc.) and we are concerned about coffee production in this district – we are visiting some farmers to find out what are their main production problems so that we can find ways to solve them and increase the quantity of coffee that you produce.

I would be very grateful therefore if you could spare a few minutes to talk to me about your farm and your coffee.

Note: your initial introduction is very important. The farmer may well think 'Oh no! Who is this? What do they want? What have I done?

Therefore a relaxed attitude is best – but courteous and not too familiar. Don't wave a big clip board around, leave that in the car. Carry only a small note-book and try to remember as much as possible, noting down only a key word or two if you feel you cannot remember everything.

Some people are naturally good at this sort of thing, other find it more difficult and may need practice with some friends or farmers that you already know well to develop a good routine that looks natural and not forced.

The questions

If you get a poor initial response or the farmer is very busy, then don't continue, move on to the next place.

If the farmer agrees with your request, you then ask some simple questions:

So what are the main problems you are facing that is affecting your coffee yields?

Remember the order in which he/she tells you the difficulties. Try to remember too the key words he tells you e.g.: '*Well, it's the cost of labour – I can't find decent workers, they are lazy and I don't have enough time to watch them...*' from this you would remember: **labour, lazy, no time.**

Ask one or two supplemental questions, e.g. : how many labourers do you need for this farm? Where do you look for your labour?

Then ask for the second problem: Apart from labour, what other problems do you have?

'Last dry season was really long, the trees really suffered, they haven't recovered yet'

Supplements, e.g. : Was this just last year? Any other weather problems?

Then move on to the third problem.

Three problems is probably enough to concentrate on. The farmer may be so concerned with one issue that it will be difficult for him/her to recall others. In which case, don't pursue this too much.

The farmer will mention things that are not directly on your list, e.g. '*I have a bad back and can't do as much as he used to.*' You can then ask if he has family to help him etc. From this you would later tick the 'labour' box and add a key word and/or make a note in the comments box.

Then ask if you could have a quick look at his coffee.

Visual inspection

During this you can ask him/her is name and verify the name of the property and how many years he has lived there. If he doesn't come with you, make a note of that.

As you walk around, note the general state of the farm:

What do the trees look like? How healthy? How old? What appear to be the main problems to you?

Look at the soil – is it bare, well mowed, is there a cover crop, or something like maize.

Are there signs of erosion? Look more broadly around – what is the landscape like? Are there a lot of other coffee farms, are the hills well covered, is there erosion, landslides?

Are there shade trees, if so what and how dense?

Look too at his house if you are near it: is it very basic, or does it look well maintained? Is there a lot of machinery/agrochemicals/vehicles around? Sometimes a farmer will tell you that he is really poor but he's wearing expensive shoes and his hands are well manicured.

All of these observations you should be able to keep in your short term memory and you will get better at it with practice.

The goodbye

Finally, thank the farmer for his time, and ask him if he has any questions.

If you think it is appropriate, a small gift could be made at this point, e.g. a T-shirt, cap.

When you get back to your vehicle, quickly fill out the form, do this immediately whilst it is fresh in your memory. Make a note of the locality, if at all possible with a GPS since you (or another person) may want to return to repeat the diagnostic – perhaps several years later.

Improvements

The form is deliberately simple, it is only an initial diagnostic, it is better to visit more farms than spend too much time on a few, to get a better overall impression of the problems of the zone.

If you feel a lot of similar problems come up that are not one of the tick-boxes, so that you are writing too many comments in the box, then alter the form to add an extra box.