

**What can Smallholders contribute to Local Food
Security and Sustainable Land Management?:
Developing a research agenda to challenge assumptions about smallholders**



Many of us subscribe to the idea that a sustainable future lies in a move towards smaller, more diverse holdings that employ more people to produce food with minimal reliance on fossil fuels. Such small, agroecological farms could provide low impact, satisfying livelihoods while producing a range of high quality food products for local markets. Sounds wonderful!

At the same time moral arguments about feeding our global population and achieving food security are being used to justify the introduction of GM crops and other means of “sustainable intensification”. The mainstream view is that smallholders are hobby farmers, providing valuable landscape, biodiversity and cultural benefits, but are not seriously contributing to national food security.

The truth is we all want to achieve food security, whilst cherishing our soils, biodiversity, landscape and rural culture. The question is, how do we achieve this? Too often the debate becomes polarised between the “pro-technological fix, industrial farming” and “small, scale ecological farmers”. What is needed is robust data to demonstrate how small, labour intensive farms can contribute to energy efficient food production. Without this, we are on a weak footing when it comes to arguing in favour of encouraging a new generation of small farmers to have an opportunity to manage the land.

A brief (10-15 minute) presentation by Rebecca, will be followed with a 45 minute structured discussion to draw existing research strands and new ideas into a coherent framework. Hence we will be in a stronger position to respond when students approach asking how they can support the movement with their research, or when any of us apply for funding to support a research idea.



