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## UN project helps West African farmers cut pesticide use, boost incomes



Farmers on a plot in Senegal

20 December 2010 – A project executed by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) in West Africa has succeeded in slashing the use of toxic pesticides, increasing yields and incomes, and diversifying farming systems.

Around 100,000 farmers in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal are participating in the community-driven training programme, which promotes good agricultural practices through small groups called Farmer Field Schools.

The project includes issues such as soil improvement and alternatives to chemical pesticides, as well as marketing and food safety, according to a news release by the Rome-based FAO.

“Trends in agriculture over the past decades in West Africa have seen an increasing use of highly toxic pesticides in higher-value, frequently irrigated crops. There is a general lack of knowledge in the region on the negative impacts of pesticides on the production, economy and health of communities and the environment,” [said](#) FAO Senior Technical Officer William Settle.

Mr. Settle noted that simple experiments in the field, as practiced by the Farmer Field Schools, have given smallholder farmers the means to produce in a more environmentally-friendly way, to substantially increase yields and earn a better income.

Typically, a group of about 25 farmers coordinated by a trainer prepares two training plots in their village, one using local conventional farming methods and another plot using best practices appropriate to the crop and location. They then observe and compare results from the two plots.

FAO noted that if resources become available, up to 500,000 farmers could be trained in the next five years at an estimated cost of around \$30-40 million.

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