

FRNs and working with CCRP

This short note outlines what it means to work on Farmer Research Networks (FRNs) with the McKnight Foundation's Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP).

The need

CCRP has an interest in FRNs as a response to some observed needs that are often not met by current research and development institutions. Three principle requirements stand out:

- Biological, economic and social performance of options for smallholder farmers almost always depend on the ecological, social and economic context in which they are used. These contexts are very heterogeneous, varying at scales from within field and household to between communities and landscapes and larger. This means conventional blanket recommendations for large areas are not useful and could misleading, and the scaling-up of packages to options beyond the contexts in which they were developed is likely to fail. If research results are to be used by larger numbers of farmers, then researchers need to find efficient ways of doing research in many different contexts and integrating results.
- R+D systems need be effective at generating knowledge and supporting action, linking social and technical innovation and building on both local and global knowledge.
- R+D systems aiming to support smallholder farmers need to involve those farmers for reasons of both effectiveness and ethics – the drivers of much participatory research.

FRNs are a way of meeting all these requirements.

What we mean by an FRN

A Farmer Research Network is a collection of farmer groups that engage in research, together with researcher and development organisations, networked so as to share information and data and get access to technical, institutional and financial support.

Principles of FRNs

The FRNs envisaged by CCRP would be built on the following principles.

- Situational analysis
- Mutual benefit
- Knowledge sharing and co-creation
- Use research to discover hidden social and technical patterns.
- Ongoing engagement
- Inclusion and equity
- Embedded scaling

CCRP is open to many different organisational and managerial models of FRNs.

What you can expect from CCRP

A CCRP-supported project working through an FRN can expect the following from the program:

- Advice and support in making principles operational
- Access to appropriate research, networking and communication tools and the means to use them
- Opportunities to engage in discussion to review and advance FRN principles and concepts
- Frameworks and support in evaluating experiences, learning and improving FRN effectiveness
- Membership in a regional community of practice that facilitates sharing of knowledge and experience related to social and technical innovation
- Research methods support: access to tools and methods for data handling (gathering, analysis and presentation of data)

What CCRP expects from projects

CCRP expects the following from an FRN project, in addition to the usual grant-compliance responsibilities:

- Commitment to implementing FRN principles
- Seeking to innovate in the means of operating the FRN
- Continuous evaluation, reflection and adaptation of approaches, including engagement with CCRP processes
- Engagement with processes aimed at developing FRN concepts and implementation, including testing new methods
- Aiming for excellence in research, using sound designs, data collection handling and analysis without compromising interactions with farmers.
- Seeking advice when having difficulties