



Ground Control: Making the grade in agriculture

By Martha Byanyima.

Africa Research Institute is pleased to announce the publication of *Ground Control*, a personal account of the evolution of agricultural standards and their importance for African governments and farmers alike.

Two thirds of Africans depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and the sector accounts for 30-40% of the continent's GDP. Flowers, fruit and vegetables from Africa are increasingly present on the shelves of European supermarkets. Smallholder farmers have been able to service the demand for out-of-season produce from consumers in Europe. While predictions of an African 'Green Revolution' are overstated, agriculture remains one of Africa's most important, but neglected, potential competitive advantages in the global economy.

Standards for agriculture are exacting. European governments have increased their regulation of imported produce since a series of high profile food safety scandals in the 1990s. Retailers have followed suit, devising a parallel system of private voluntary standards in response to consumer concerns about food safety, the environment and labour conditions. Farmers – large and small – have no option but to comply.

In this timely study, Martha Byanyima chronicles the history and development of agricultural standards in Africa. She argues that stringent standards present opportunities for African countries to increase their stake in the global trade in food. Her account examines the cost and complexity imposed on many African smallholders. Although much progress has been made in negotiating viable standards – public and private – Martha calls for institutional reform, more education of smallholders, and better co-ordination of supply chains.

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