

the lessons behind the lagging agricultural dynamism explained in this volume are taken to heart before the *Afrim III* survey is carried out.

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*Challenges for African Agriculture.* Edited by Jean-Claude Devèze. Paris and Washington DC: Agence Française de Développement and the World Bank (2011), pp. 267, £26.50. ISBN: 978-0-8213-8481-7.

This book focuses on smallholder agriculture or family farms in three parts: 1. African agriculture in the face of multiple challenges – demographic, economic and environmental; 2. Steering transitions of rural economies – five fields of action that can be incorporated into government policies: land tenure, innovation processes, regional food markets, agricultural finance and human capital development; 3. Cross-cutting views which gives platform to four African officials who present their vision for the future of agriculture and action that needs to be promoted.

The book ends with a question: ‘Can tropical Africa be a future agricultural giant?’ and a conclusion that ‘the recent return to favour of agricultural development can and must allow farmers in Africa to take their rightful place, as they do in Brazil, which has lifted itself to the rank of agricultural giant in the space of two decades.’ Unfortunately, no explanation is provided about what is so different about the agriculture production paradigm in Brazil (which is based on no-till farming) and why it is succeeding.

The title and content of the book reflect the changing attitude of the development-assistance community in the North from its customary desire to impose a top-down paradigm for development in African Agriculture to elaborating instead what might be key challenges and how they might be met. The book is a cumbersome attempt to reinvent the development rhetoric. Much credibility would have been added to the book had it elaborated the new paradigm of *sustainable production intensification* (as reflected by no-till farming) upon which much of the smallholder agriculture will have to depend for its future survival and prosperity.

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*Sustainable Agriculture Reviews 6: Alternative Farming Systems, Biotechnology, Drought Stress and Ecological Fertilisation.* Edited by E. Lichtfouse. Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer (2010), pp. 354, £135.00. ISBN 978-94-007-085-4.

This series of books collates review articles to provide scientists, policy makers and producers with a sound knowledge-base of current agricultural issues and to introduce novel, environmentally friendly solutions that paved the way for developing sustainable agricultural systems. The latest edition covers a disparate range of issues from phytoremediation techniques for pesticide contamination, ecological fertilization and the role of transgenic BT corn in pest management, marker-assisted breeding to tropical homegardens in Bangladesh. Each review stands alone and they vary in scope and quality and also in the extent to which they present alternative strategies for sustainability. Valuable reviews on the effect of drought stress on crop reproduction and soil microbes as biocontrol agents of plant diseases increase our understanding of important processes within farming systems but could go further in demonstrating how this knowledge could be applied to develop new approaches. Similarly, a comprehensive review of the state of art for marker-assisted breeding would benefit from discussing the implications of this biotechnology for sustainable crop production. We found of most interest the review of sustainable land use and agricultural soils that considers the temporal and spatial scale. It postulates the importance of indicators of soil quality, such as biological activity and soil organic matter and proposes close collaboration among scientists, land managers and policy makers as a way to adopt sustainable land use practises.

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