



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Sara Gets the Message: Texts Plant Profits for Malawi Farmers

At the end of the year in [Malawi](#), the “planting” rains arrive. Families get to work swinging hoes, clearing land, weeding and planting maize, beans, soy and tobacco. By March, if rainfall is sufficient, the parched landscape transforms into an emerald ocean of ripening crops that by mid-year are safely in store. This is when speculative grain traders arrive.

Farmers everywhere need cash to pay loans, school fees, medical bills and other expenses such as agricultural inputs. Traders know this and rural farmers usually succumb, selling their crops well below market value. Later, traders sell these grains in bulk, posting significant profits for themselves.

Challenging this system that leaves farmers with little profit has been difficult without access to widespread, reliable market information and alternative outlets. Modern cellular communications and widespread cell phone ownership, however, are beginning to provide windows of opportunity across Africa. Texting has exploded in many African countries as an important tool that bypasses lack of traditional infrastructure and links providers of products and services to their customers.

Sara Maunda is one of a growing number of farmers doing just that—taking charge of marketing their own crops and keeping more profit for themselves with the help of market information. With training from USAID/Malawi’s Market Linkages Initiative, she registered to receive regular market information updates on her cell phone from Esoko, a Ghanaian company with a franchise in Malawi. The “E” stands for electronic, and *soko* is Swahili for market.

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