

Smallholder Tobacco Production and Food Security in Malawi

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This paper examines the rapid expansion of smallholder export crop production in Malawi during the last two decades. It focuses on the relationship between smallholder burley tobacco production and food security. The dominant narrative during the donor-driven reform process asserted how burley growers' food security would increase through improved access to food (via increased incomes) *and* increased production of food crops (mainly maize). The paper offers evidence on the second of these channels through detailing findings from a literature review, spatial analysis, intensive livelihoods research in the Central Region of Malawi during 2002-2004, and recent analysis of national datasets. The paper argues that there is little evidence that growers increased production of food crops on farm, either by intensifying maize production or by diversifying cropping patterns. Instead, the evidence suggests that growers became increasingly reliant on maize purchases to maintain their food security, exacerbating seasonal price spikes in tobacco-rich districts, and, in the worst years, helping to price the poorest out of the market. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for agricultural policies promoting smallholder export crop production in Southern and Eastern Africa.