

SPECIAL EDITION | 2018

# COMMODITIES

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## The Dawn of a New Era



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# Big data unlocking farmer's potential



CARA WATERFALL  
ECOM Communication,  
ECOM Agroindustrial Corp.

The future of farming is in big data, but how do you harness its power in a way that makes it actionable? SMS Integrity (SMSi) by ECOM is a perfect example of how to give farmers back their agency by developing an electronic platform that enables the Sustainable Management Services (SMS) team to answer the many questions growers have, from the optimal timing for harvesting to plant stressors and soil conditions. SMS teams, located in 23 countries in Asia, Central and South America, and East and West Africa, embody how a trading company can act as a local processor. By participating locally and buying from producers at the origin, companies like ours understand the importance of investing in the long-term success of its farmers and their networks. Sustainability is more and more at the core of trading companies' business strategy as evidenced by the continued growth of SMS since 2004. As a products and services provider for rural populations, it helps farmers at the grass roots level by creating the best, integrated supply chains. Today, SMS has over 1100 staff, who empower farmers by providing high-value services that aid them in their transition from subsistence farming to business farming. SMSi was developed to combat the ever-expanding data needs of a trading company and its farmers, of whom the vast majority live in rural areas with

little or no connectivity. Big data is essential in helping understand the effectiveness of products and service offerings. By identifying inefficiencies, it can invest in the operations that yield the best returns, thereby optimising the benefits for all parties involved. Most importantly, it provides the support, infrastructure and environment required to sustain farmers and their livelihoods.

SMSi collects actionable data so its agronomists and field technicians can access real-time information to enhance overall farm productivity. The platform is capable of analysing inputs and outputs, providing farm practice recommendations and analysing a farmer's income. SMS delivers customised products and services — including various types of training and financial products — to its 700,000 registered farmers.

A highly experienced field team is equipped to deal with the most rural circumstances. A typical week for the SMS team involves mapping and surveying approximately 3000 farmers. The team provides coaching assistance, training and assessment and enters the information directly into their tablets, thereby decreasing the number of errors. And roaming audit teams conduct blind checks that are reviewed by the head office to verify that the surveyors have submitted correct data.

SMSi currently contains information on 320,000 coffee and cocoa farmers from 16 of the 23 countries in which it operates. It will eventually house data for all of ECOM's commodities, including edible nuts, spices and cotton.

SMSi has given our company remarkable decision-making capabilities to optimise the productivity of farmers. Everyone — from clients to partners and investors — can learn more about the

EVERYONE FROM CLIENTS TO PARTNERS AND INVESTORS CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT THE QUALITY, TRACEABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN.

quality, traceability and sustainability of the supply chain. We continue to develop partnerships that will provide macro-level data to complement the micro-level data of SMSi, allowing SMS to adjust its advisory business accordingly. Drone technology is another source of data that might help explore the impact of climate change on its farmers.

"We are only now beginning to unleash the power of big data to increase the prosperity of our farmers, clients and investors" said Emmanuel Toureille, Chief Sustainability Officer, ECOM. "We are leveraging blockchain technology by pulling information from various systems to provide one common ledger. By deconstructing links within the supply chain, we are able to provide transparent and incorruptible data on the origins and journey of our products."

Above all, SMSi is a collaborative system that is leading its farmers and stakeholders to greener pastures. By extracting and analysing big data from the most information-poor regions, it is possible to leverage data to increase farmers' well-being and livelihoods, while reducing environmental impact and costs. ■



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