LESSONS FROM INCOFIN'S AGTECH PORTFOLIO, PART I:
PARTNERSHIPS ARE CRITICAL FOR BUILDING INROADS INTO SMALLHOLDER FARMING COMMUNITIES

Smallholder farmers are among the most challenging demographic to work with. They tend to be located in remote, difficult-to-access locations often characterized by poor infrastructure and potential security concerns. Their income is typically near or below the poverty line and they often live in areas prone to natural disasters and heavily impacted by the effects of climate change. Smallholder farmers also tend to be older (above 50), with limited formal education and an aversion to new ways of doing things. Given what often amounts to neglect from the state and occasional mistreatment from intermediaries and bad actors, they tend to be mistrustful of outsiders.

Because the grantees have less than a year to roll out their services and they each must meet minimum user goals part of their participation in the Innovation Call, they don't have the luxury of spending years building trust with smallholder farming communities. As a result, many of the organizations participating in the Innovation Call have sought to develop partnerships with entities that have long-established relationships with smallholder farming communities. A few such partnerships are outlined below.

In 2024, agri fintech **Suyana** reached an agreement with UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. UNICEF has been able to introduce Suyana to many smallholder farming communities in rural areas in Bolivia that may be interested in its early warning and parametric insurance products. UNICEF has been working in these communities for decades and has earned their trust. UNICEF was able to facilitate focus groups and end-user experience research for Suyana, with farmers traveling as much as five or six hours on foot to lend their perspective and hear about the proposed services, something they likely would not have done had **UNICEF** not facilitated the meetings (see **Figure 1**).[1]

Figure 1: *Unicef facilitates meetings with farmers in Ravelo, Bolivia (2025).*

Source: Suyana.

[1] Suyana interview. July 2025.

Colcafé is a Colombian coffee roaster, part of the Nutresa group of companies. Though Colcafé sources much of its coffee from smallholder farmers, it does not work with these farmers directly. When Colcafé decided to launch Secafé, a mobile app that would help smallholder farmers improve the coffee drying process and thus the quality of the coffee they were producing, it relied heavily on Sucafina, a Swiss-based coffee trader that has been operating in Colombia since 2016. Sucafina maintains relationships with several coffee cooperatives and is helping Colcafé collect information from farmers about their pain points around the drying process Sucafina will also be instrumental in spreading the word about the Secafé application. The two organizations held a launch event in August 2025 which was well attended (see **Figure 2**).[2]

Figure 2: *Secafé APP launch event in Ciudad Bolívar (Antioquia), Colombia, on Aug 22nd, 2025*

Source: Incofin Foundation.

Peruvian agritech **SpaceAg** has historically provided its satellite-based farm management solutions to large agricultural exporters. Thanks to its participation in the Innovation Call, it is now testing a new crop management product aimed at smallholder farmers working in the potato value chain. The solution will help farmers optimize the use of inputs during the production of their potato crop. To identify new customers for its new product it has teamed with Farmex, a large input supplier in Peru. Farmex is not only playing a critical role in identifying potential customers for SpaceAg's new product, it is also supporting the training of technical advisors and users of the application.[3]

Bolivian shared-tractor start-up **Hola Tractor** teamed up with tractor manufacturer **Massey Ferguson** to identify new tractor purchasers that it could bring into its network of tractor owners willing to let their tractors be used in a shared economy model. More recently it has teamed with Fundación Trabajo Empresa, to expand its reach among young female entrepreneurs in rural agents that can act as aggregators or agents on its platform (see **Figure 3**).[4]

Figure 3: *Training session with prospective booking agents from Tres Cruces, Bolivia, April, 2025*

Source: Francisa Herrera, Hola Tractor.

[2] Colcafé interview. July 2025.
[3] SpaceAg interview. July 2025.
[4] Hola Tractor interview. July 2025.

Many of the organizations interviewed for this report that have forged these strategic alliances stated that these partnerships have been critical as they prepare to launch or expand their digital agriculture solution in the second half of 2025. **SpaceAg,** for example, is seeking to replicate the success it has found with Farmex with other similar organizations to further expand its reach. Other organizations interviewed, particularly those entering a new vertical segment (e.g. **Sommos**) or new country (e.g. **Ignitia**) are looking to develop these types of partnerships as they prepare to launch services in the second half of the year.

As can be seen from the examples provided above, partnerships that help digital agriculture solution providers expand their reach among smallholder farmers can take several shapes. Digital service providers have partnered with development agencies (United Nations), donors (Fundación Trabajo Empresa), traders (Sucafina), input suppliers (Farmex), agricultural machinery makers (Massey Ferguson), among others. **Ignitia,** for its part, found success in Africa by teaming with mobile network operators (MNOs), yet a different type of actor in the broader digital agriculture ecosystem. What all these partners have in common is a history of working in rural areas that have earned them the trust of the communities in which they work.

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