

Zimbabwe's YouFarm helps farmers raise funding

Zimbabwean startup YouFarm is providing collateral-free funding to farmers by allowing users to invest in crops and livestock, and share the profits with the farmer when the produce goes to market.

By [Tom Jackson](#) 5 Jul 2018



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Launched in October of last year, [YouFarm](#) also provides farmers with expert agronomists, access to technologies such as satellite and drone data, and accurate weather forecasting.

"We are trying to introduce precision farming to rural, small-scale and commercial farmers in Zimbabwe. By providing access to technology we hope to reduce wastage and increase yields by creating smarter farms and smarter farmers," founder and chief executive officer (CEO) John-Paul Matenga told Disrupt Africa.

The idea for the startup came to Matenga when, at the end of 2016, his mother acquired a farm.

"She turned to me and asked me to do something with the land. I looked at my situation. I was 33 at the time, had no farming experience, and did not own any property I could borrow against," he said. "But I had 247 hectares of arable land with good water sources. I suddenly realised that there were thousands of financially disenfranchised farmers in Zimbabwe and Africa who have access to land but no access to finance for production."

To solve this problem, Matenga built the YouFarm crowd-farming platform, which works in a very similar way to Nigeria's [Farmcrowdy](#). Bootstrapped thus far, YouFarm will take a share of profits when produce goes to market. It is still pre-revenue at this point, but has started fundraising for its first official project and will be planting four hectares of cabbage this week.

"The uptake has been overwhelming. We had to stop advertising to farmers because we cannot keep up with the demand. In June we opened up to crop investors, and again the uptake has been very encouraging, with the majority of investors being Zimbabweans who are based in the diaspora who want to invest back home," Matenga said.

Providing alternative ways to farming

YouFarm's local competition comes from organisations that provide alternative ways of financing farmers, such as

microfinance institutions (MFIs), savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) and contract farming companies.

"We are the first crowd-farming platform in Zimbabwe so we are currently swimming in a blue ocean," said Matenga.

The biggest difficulty faced by the startup so far has been on the issue of legislation. "Zimbabwe does not have any crowdfunding laws," Matenga said. "The second issue is credibility. As a startup asking strangers to trust you with their hard earned money is a hard task, which is why we can't wait for the results of our MVP."

YouFarm is currently working on building its base in Zimbabwe, but does plan to take its platform to Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi and Botswana in the future.

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