Abstract: Although improving agricultural productivity is vital to anti-poverty and food security goals, its ecological effects are theoretically ambiguous. Increasing the relative value of agricultural land may spur deforestation, but factor market constraints paired with improvements in existing land productivity may reduce the demand for shifting cultivation. Leveraging the discontinuity in eligibility for a large agricultural extension program, we find that the program reduced deforestation by 13%. The program increased adoption of promoted practices such as manure-use and crop rotation resulting in higher productivity but no increase in cultivated area. Suitably designed programs improving agricultural productivity may also enable conservation.

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