

Training Needs of Agro-input Dealers in South 24 Parganas District of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Agro-input dealers play a very useful role in agricultural production system. They contribute towards strengthening the Agricultural Extension System by providing valuable service to the farming community. It is essential that they are equipped with latest know how through refresher training. The present study was conducted during 2013-14 in South 24 district of West Bengal to ascertain training needs of agro-input retailers. Data was collected through personal interview of 66 retailers using structured interview schedule. Respondents were found to be highly educated with three fourths of them having senior secondary and graduate degrees. Around 51 percent of the respondents mobilized their own resources for the business and only 29 per cent sought bank credit. Identification of different pest and pesticides emerged as the most needed training area followed by diagnostics. Among crop specific training need, vegetable crops ranked first followed by rice. Training in computer and its application in business is another preferred area. Lack of capital, lack of need based training, seasonality in the business of pesticide were some of the constraints identified by the pesticide retailers in south 24 Paraganas.

Key words: *Agro-input dealers; Training; Farming community;*

Rising population of India places constant pressure on agriculture to improve productivity. The misuse of pesticides in such scenario is very likely. The harmful effects of the pesticides are now established worldwide. Farmers and agricultural labourers are the direct users of pesticides and are more likely to get affected by the acute toxicity of pesticides. The chronic toxicity affects the whole population. The farmers were found to be largely unaware of correct usage of pesticides. The outreach of state agriculture universities and departments to the farmers was minimal (*Bhushan et. al., 2013*). They are mostly guided by the dealers/retailers in selection and use of plant protection chemicals.

Public extension service is often criticized for not being able to handle the multifarious demands of the farming community. Private sector extension providers viz., Input Dealers, Producers Association, NGOs, Corporate sector etc. have entered the extension scenario. About 2.82 lakh Agri-Input Dealers are operating in rural areas covering almost all parts of the country (*Goel, 2003*). They have become one of the important

sources of farm information to the farming community though not equipped with adequate knowledge.

The network of dealers has spread to the villages and is accepted as a potent media to reach out to large farming community. In order to enable this network serve the farming community in a better way, they need to be trained in scientific agriculture. Hence, the present study was undertaken with the following objectives –

- (i) To study the personal and situational characteristics of agro-input dealers in south 24 Paraganas,
- (ii) To assess their training needs and
- (iii) To identify the constraints faced by the input dealers.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted during 2013-14 in South 24 Paraganas district of West Bengal. Two institutions in this district are conducting one year long diploma course foAK Singh, HK De and PP Pal

r input dealer's viz., State Agricultural Extension Management and Training Institute, Narendrapur and Ramakrishna Ashram KrishiVigyan Kendra, Nimpith.

The course christened as Diploma for Agricultural Extension Services for Input Dealers (DAESI) is being offered through weekly class room contact method under the supervision of MANAGE, Hyderabad. A total of 66 participants from the two institutions are selected randomly. Respondents were surveyed through personal interview using pre-tested structured interview schedule.

After thorough review of relevant literature and in consultation with experts of relevant field the potential training areas were identified. These areas were rated by the respondents on three point rating scale as 'Most needed' 'Needed' and 'Not needed' for which score 3, 2, and 1 was assigned. Training need was measured by computing the weighted mean score. Areas of training were ranked as per the weighted mean score. Simple statistical measures like frequency distribution, percentage and weighted mean were used to interpret the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic profile of the agro-input dealers : It is evident from Table 1 that 46.9 per cent of the respondents belonged to young age group (<35 years) and 39.3% belonged to middle age group. Around 57 per cent were educated up to senior secondary level and 18.25 have graduation degree. Educated and young

Table 1. Socioeconomic profile of the agro-input dealers (N=66)

Variable	Category	No.	%
Age	Young(<35 years)	31	46.9
	Middle (36-45 years)	26	39.3
	Old age (>46 years)	9	13.6
Education	Up to VIII standard)	—	—
	High school (X th)	16	24.2
	Higher sec. (XII th)	38	57.5
	Graduate	12	18.2
Sources of finance	PG and above	-	
	Bank and other financial institutions	19	28.8
	Friends/ partners	8	12.1
	Family/ relatives	34	51.5
	No outside source	2	3.0
	Local money lender	3	4.5

people entering the agro-input business are an encouraging trend. Many of them after finishing college education have joined their fathers in the same business. Significant percentage (51.5%) of respondents had sought financial assistance from family and relatives followed by 12.00 per cent who had fulfilled credit needs from friends/partners. The study also reveals that only 29 per cent availed institutional credit (banks, cooperatives etc.) to maintain and run their business. In regard to managerial ability about half of the pesticide

Table 2. Training needs of agro-input dealers in pest management

Training areas	Most needed	Needed	Not needed	Weight MS	Rank
Insect pest, management and its components viz. Cultural, mechanical, biological, chemical and legal.	61	5	0	2.92	III
Identification of different pest and pesticides.	63	3	0	2.95	I
Diagnostic and characteristic symptom and damage caused by insect pest.	62	4	0	2.93	II
Control of non-insect pest-rat, birds, termites, etc.	43	20	3	2.60	IX
Trade name, chemical name and properties of pesticides.	43	20	3	2.60	IX
Trade name, chemical name and properties of weedicides.	47	18	1	2.69	VI
Trade name, chemical name and properties of micro nutrients (growth hormone).	46	18	2	2.66	VII
Maintenance, selection, use and care of different sprayers, dusters, etc; their minor repairs.	37	22	7	2.45	X
Precautions in handling- storing and use of antidotes in case of accidents.	40	14	12	2.42	XI
Bio-fertilizer - its use and importance.	57	6	3	2.81	IV
Different equipments for training, grafting, spraying, etc.42	21	3	2.63	VII	
Crop management (herbicide tolerant programs, etc.)	51	13	2	2.74	V

retailers (48.5%) had medium level of managerial ability followed by 31.8 and 19.6 per cent had high and low ability to manage their business respectively. Risk bearing ability, achievement motivation, and knowledge and aspiration level of the pesticide retailers were also found to be at medium levels. *Mande & Darade (2011)* found that majority (75.80%) of the farm input dealers had medium level of knowledge about advance technology related to use of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides.

Training needs as perceived by the agro-input dealers: Training needs of the pesticide retailers in different areas of pest management are presented in Table 2. Identification of different pest and pesticides emerged as the most needed training area and is ranked I with mean score 2.95. Other training areas in descending order of training need score are Diagnostics, symptoms and damages caused by insect pest; Insect pest management and its components; diagnostic and characteristic symptom and damage caused by insect pest; bio-fertilizer-its use and importance; crop management (herbicide tolerant programs, etc. ; trade name, chemical name and properties of weedicides; trade name, chemical name and properties of micro nutrients (growth hormone) ;control of non-insect pest-rat, birds, termites, etc., *Mande & Darade (2011)* observed that all farm input dealers of Latur District in Marathwada region of Maharashtra State perceived

(100%) training needs on various aspects of pesticides applications.

Table 3 shows that among crop specific training needs, vegetable crops ranked first with weighted mean score 2.89. Training in Rice, oilseeds, pulses, flowers and fruits, tuber crops and cash crops were the other areas indicated by the dealers. Agro-climatic conditions are quite conducive for vegetable cultivation in South 24 Paragana and more than 20 vegetables belonging to cruciferous (Cole crops), solanaceous, cucurbitaceous, leguminous, tuber crops and leafy vegetables are grown in the district. Consumption of pesticide in vegetable farming is quite high. Hence, pest management in vegetables has assumed significance among the retailers. Next important crop is paddy.

Training needs of the agro-input dealers in ICT areas are given in Table 4. Application of computer for billing and accounting purposes ranked I with mean score 2.84. Other areas of training in descending order are internet; record keeping software; CD-ROM; E-mail, Scanning and record keeping. The application of ICT has brought about enormous changes in the world of work, especially in the field of marketing. These changes bring along professional challenges to equip, train, and retrain the personnel in distributing and marketing with modern skills. Using Information Communication Technology (ICT), is crucial to most businesses, regardless of size. It is important to a retailer

Table 3. Training needs in crop specific pest management

Training areas	Most needed	Needed	Not needed	Weighted MS	Rank
Rice	51	15	0	2.77	II
Cereal other than rice (wheat)	26	32	8	2.27	VIII
Pulses	46	19	1	2.68	IV
Oil seed	49	16	1	2.72	III
Vegetables	59	7	0	2.89	I
Tuber crops	39	21	6	2.59	V
Cash crops	38	18	10	2.42	VII
Flowers and fruits	39	23	4	2.53	VI

Table 4. Training needs in computer application

Training areas	Most needed	Needed	Not needed	Weighted MS	Rank
Record keeping	47	14	5	2.63	V
Record keeping software	51	12	3	2.72	III
Computer	57	8	1	2.84	I
CD-ROM	50	13	3	2.71	IV
Internet	52	13	1	2.77	II
E-mail, Scanning	48	17	1	2.71	IV

aiming to expand and to improve efficiency. The use of ICT also improves customer services and consequently customer satisfaction. The respondents being educated and young in age have the potential to use ICT to their advantage.

Table 5. Constraints faced by agro-input dealers

Statements	No.	%	Rank
Lack of capital	63	95.4	I
Non-availability of bank loan	50	72.3	IV
Fluctuation of selling on seasonal basis	60	91.9	III
High cost in transportation	61	92.4	II
Irregular contact of extension worker with the retailers	31	46.9	VI
Lack of need based training	61	92.4	II
Lack of knowledge in maintaining stock book and sales register of the product	13	19.6	VIII
Lack of technical knowledge of the retailers about brands of product	18	27.2	VII
Delay in renewal of the licence	44	66.7	V

It is evident from Table 5 that over 95 percent of the respondents faced lack of capital. High cost of transportation and lack of need based training are indicated by 92.4 % respondents. Earlier the distributor used to deliver goods to the retailers. As this practice is discontinued the retailers incur expenditure in transportation while they are bound to sell at maximum retail price. Problem of fluctuation in sale of pesticides on seasonal basis is also reported by 92 per cent respondents.

Around 80 per cent of the respondents faced problem of non-availability of bank loan. This is closely followed by delay in renewal of license (67%). Lengthy

process for renewal of license may be one the reasons for this delay (Singh *et. al.* 2013). Further 47 per cent faces problem of irregular contact with extension worker whereas, 27 per cent expressed lack of technical knowledge about different brands of product, active ingredients, dose etc. around 19.6 per cent expressed lack of knowledge in maintaining stock book and sales register of the products.

CONCLUSION

Socioeconomic profile reveals that educated and young people are entering the agro-input business. This is an encouraging trend however; this group of people needs to be equipped with scientific information. The study also reveals that the core areas of insect pest management in which agro-input dealers need training are identification of different pest and pesticides and diagnostics. Among crop specific training need, vegetable crops ranked first followed by rice. Application of computer in their business and other tools help advancing the business and dealers desires to have training. Professional Institutions offering training like MANAGE, SAUs, ICAR Institutes, KVKs may lay emphasis on these preferences while designing and conducting training programme for retailers and input suppliers. The more equipped the dealers are the more efficient service could be rendered. Training them will ensure quality of service and advices rendered and contribute to evolving the input dealers into para-professionals.

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