

Farmers Farm School: An Innovative Extension Approach for Today

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Available online at
<http://sunshineagriculture.vitalbiotech.org/>

Article History

Received: 13. 09.2023

Revised: 18. 09.2023

Accepted: 25. 09.2023

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INTRODUCTION

India is a country of villages where farmers live in widely dispersed communities which makes it difficult to motivate the farmers about new innovations in agriculture and dairying. Over the years, the transfer of technology has focused on such improved technologies and it has been a common target of most agricultural research. It is well known that farming conditions are different and technologies has to be according to these varying needs. Looking the problems faced by the dairy farmers in this area, establishing farmers farm school was felt as a need to tackle the issues faced by farmers. Alternative practices are not always assumed to be better than traditional practices. Farmers must conduct their own testing and observations to determine what works best. The Farmers Farm School provides a risk-free environment for discussing, dissecting, modifying, and experimenting with innovative agricultural management ideas. It acts as a means to address the problems in dairy farming and tries to solve them by imparting scientific knowledge and motivating them to adopt the same.

ORIGIN OF FARMERS FARM SCHOOL

Farmers Farm School was founded on August 30, 2014, as a refined form of farmers field school, by the Dairy Extension Division of ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute. It is established in four villages of Karnal district namely Gorgarh, Deepo, Bhoji Khalsa and Johar Majra. It started with the aim to enhance the productivity of agricultural products. It offers one-year non-formal education to enrolled dairy farmers of the village. The objectives of this approach are as follows;

1. To educate the farming community on latest know-how of agricultural innovations
2. To empower the farm youth through capacity building
3. To minimize the cost of agricultural production
4. To strengthen the linkages of researcher and end users

Farmers Farm School is a farmer centered adult education system. A competent coordinator is appointed for coordinating and managing the one-year programme in a systematic manner, minimizing all the errors. A curriculum by analyzing the need and importance of the locality has been developed. A chance is given to farmers to select the topics of their interest and need and major emphasis is given on such topics selected by the farmers attending classes and lectures were delivered based on basic needs of the farmers. To some extent, participation of farmers is ensured in the curriculum development and modification. Information is disseminated through social media platforms like WhatsApp by forming group “Farmers Farm School”, where agricultural scientists and students of Farmers Farm School are the members.

NEED FOR FARMERS FARM SCHOOL

Extension work is a mechanism to transfer of technologies. The technologies being developed at institute level should reach up to the grass-root level so that farmers gain benefits out of it. It is a top-down approach of transfer of technology. Complex farming situations is a problem that has to be addressed. Farmers Farm School approach can educate farmers about complex technologies and can increase their level of understanding. Involvement of farmers in technology generation is very less. Even though they are equipped with lots of ideas, they don't get proper platforms to demonstrate their abilities. Farmers farm school can help them in making them realize their own abilities and can offer chances to execute them in a systematic

manner by ensuring help from institute level. Another problem is that Farmers have hesitation to interact with researcher at institute level. Farmers farm school helps in breaking all the stereotypes and builds confidence in the farmers for delivering their ideas and to interact with others without any reluctance and thus shapes confidence in them.

PRINCIPLES OF FARMERS FARM SCHOOL

Principles of Farmers Farm School are similar to those of farmers field school and are represented below;

1. Learning by doing-Effective learning happens when adults learn through experience rather than listening at lectures.
2. Farmer led learning activities- Uniqueness of Farmers field school, as far as content is concerned: Farmers decide what is relevant for them and accordingly FFS addresses the same.
3. Learning from mistakes-each person's experience is unique and thus valid.
4. Learn how to learn-In this process, farmers build their capacity to observe things, analyse them, and make sensible decisions.
5. Problem solving- problems were posed as challenges not as constraints.
6. The farming community is the learning ground- the field crop or livestock production system is the major tool for learning.
7. Systematic training process- key steps are the observation, group discussion, analysis, decision-making, and action-planning.

MODUS OPERANDI OF FARMERS FARM SCHOOL

- ✚ The classes will be conducted on every Friday and Saturday
- ✚ Two thematic lectures on recommend practices will be delivered in a day
- ✚ In the batch, a group of 20-25 active farmers with common interest

- ✚ It is based on an innovative, participatory and interactive learning approach
- ✚ Quiz will be organized every month and incentives will be given to three toppers
- ✚ Main exam will be conducted after completing one year

IMPLEMENTATION OF FARMERS FARM SCHOOL

Farmers Farm School is organized in a selected village for a period of one year. Every FFS batch is organized with 20-25 active farmers. It is organized on IFS theme to achieve the better results. The basic data of village such as demographic and dairy farming and its allied activities has to be taken in advance for effective implementation of FFS. Framework and content of FFS will be discussed with village Sarpanch and groups of active farmers. One facilitator will be trained in subject and methodology. Major emphasis is given on animal husbandry and dairy farming practices. Apart from this, other topics such as crop farming, horticulture, climate change and community development are also covered on need basis. Active farmers, energetic farmers-oriented experts, audio visual aids, black/white board and chalk/pen, notebook and pen, manual in hindi (local language) and one skilled person are the required materials for Farmers Farm School. Experts of ICAR institutes such as NDRI, IARI, IIWBR, CSSRI etc., officials of state government, bank officials and NGO personnel are involved in FFS. First of all, issues in the village will be identified and it will be documented. Accordingly, course curriculum will be developed for one year

programme under five main dimensions; Animal breeding, feeding of dairy animals, management practices, health care and fodder production. Under each major dimensions subtopics will be set by identifying the need of the enrolled farmers as given in the table below; For each sub topics, need based lectures will be provided along with practical or exposure visits to farms or concerned institutes.

CONCLUSION

Farmers field school (FFS) is considered as one of the most effective and innovative extension approach ever developed. A group-based adult learning strategy called "farmer field schools" teaches farmers how to explore and find solutions on their own. Sometimes, it is referred to as "schools without walls". In FFS, farmer groups routinely get together with a facilitator to watch, converse, and learn together. Following the principles of farmers field school, a new approach was designed by ICAR-NDRI to address the needs and problems of dairy farmers in particular. It acts as a medium for enhancing the knowledge base of the participant farmers and thus encourages them in adopting the scientific dairy farming technologies and practices in their field condition. It also acts as a platform where farmers can interact with experts of a number of disciplines and can share their experiences and views on various aspects related to dairy farming. In short, Farmers farm school acts as a medium for empowering the dairy farmers of the locale where it is established.