

A portal in which the A to Z of farming is just a click away

January 31, 2013

Breaking the communication barrier and knowledge gap is a must today



Awareness needed: A training session in progress.— Photo: Special Arrangement

The science of communication is getting more advanced everyday. From desktop computers/laptops and ipads to smartphones, information is just a click away. "What our farmers need today for successful farming is the right information that can be made available to them easily. Breaking the communication barrier and knowledge gap that exists today becomes imperative.

Three centres

"From our side we have initiated the e-Extension Centre putting to optimum use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and created a website called Agritech portal" (www.agritech.tnau.ac.in) which gives an exhaustive A-Z list of agriculture," says Dr. S. Haripriya, Assistant Professor (Horticulture), TNAU, Vridachalam. "Our Vriddhachalam Kendra has devised a three-day training programme to farmers of Cuddalore district with minimum educational qualification of 10th standard to make them aware about how to use a computer and browse the Internet for gathering information related to their fields," she says. Interested farmers in the region are asked to pre-register for this training at this Kendra. Based on the responses from them we plan to select about 10 farmers per batch usually on first-come-first-served basis. Five desktop computers with internet connection are being used to impart the training. During the training, basic theoretical information and hands-on training regarding what is a computer, how to operate it, browsing the Internet to get agriculture related information etc are scheduled to be imparted. In the last two years about 200 farmers have been trained in similar programmes.

Statistics

"We kept a record on the farmers who underwent the training and were able to find that an average of five farmers accessed agricultural information using the net in a week using the computer hub in this Kendra. Around one percent of them started using computers in their households," she says. Recently, the farmers started gathering new information from the portal approached the specialist of this Kendra for further action oriented queries. On knowing about the prevailing weather conditions in the State from the weather network page they started to pre-plan the cultural operations, harvesting and drying of the harvested produce. Some proactive farmers have also used the portal to choose major markets in South based on the produce price data available on the dynamic market information page. When the State is facing a power crisis for nearly 10 to 12 hours daily how can farmers be expected to use computers?

No excuse

"Presently the power cut is for 12 hours in all districts. But there is some supply for the remaining hours. And many farmers use the supply time to charge their mobiles. Wi-fi and data card for net browsing are becoming a common facility on mobiles these days. If one person in the family (college going student) has a good handset then the farmer can easily get information from it."Take the case of Kissan mobile services. Several farmers use the facility as and when required. And today almost all high school students have laptops provided by the government. Such computers have battery back up for nearly 4-5 hours so this is not really a problem for interested farmers. All one needs is the attitude," she says categorically.

Both English and Tamil

The web portal has both Tamil and English versions, the regional version prepared by specialists from this Kendra. Both the manuals are designed in an illustrative format to facilitate quick and easy viewing. More emphasis has been given on teaching methodology, particularly communicating the contents in a simple and understandable way to the farmers.

In this emerging era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), there is a necessity to bridge the digital divide currently prevailing among the farmers, according to her.

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