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Mahesh Kumar Poonia
Associate Professor
(Horticulture), College of
Agriculture, Nagaur, Agriculture
University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan,
India

Manju Kumari
Assistant Professor (Pl.
Pathology), College of
Agriculture, Nagaur, Agriculture
University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan,
India

BL Dhaka
Assistant Professor (Ag.
Extension), Agricultural
Research Station, Umedganj,
Kota, Rajasthan, India

Corresponding Author:
Mahesh Kumar Poonia
Associate Professor
(Horticulture), College of
Agriculture, Nagaur, Agriculture
University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan,
India

Enhancing technical competency of agri-input dealers through training

Mahesh Kumar Poonia, Manju Kumari and BL Dhaka

Abstract

To improve the technical competence of input dealers, a 48-days training programme was organized by College of Agriculture, Nagaur in Rajasthan. After the completion of training, an evaluation study was designed to assess the effectiveness of the training. The study found that the respondent had a positive attitude towards the training course. The knowledge and skill levels of the respondents increased, which in turn improved the technical competence of the input dealers. The training positively contributed to the input dealers gain confidence in the diffusion of the technology.

Keywords: Agriculture, extension, farmers input dealers

Introduction

There has been a constant transformation of Indian agriculture from food-deficit subsistence agriculture to food-self-sufficient commercial agriculture. Modern technologies, the dedicated efforts of Indian farmers, and programmatic support from central and state governments have all contributed significantly to the achievement of food production. However, to maintain this growth rate and achieve the required food grain production, a long-term strategy, including an effective and efficient agricultural information dissemination mechanism, is needed. As such, efforts are underway to proactively integrate private sector companies, farmer organizations, agripreneurs, NGOs, cooperatives and other non-government sector agencies, including input traders, in the extension service delivery mechanism.

Agri-input dealers in the country are a primary source of agricultural information for the farming community, in addition to the provision of inputs and credit. When purchasing the various inputs needed for the farm, the farmer naturally tries to find out from the input dealer about the use of the inputs, both in terms of quality and quantity. However, the majority of these traders have no formal agricultural training. If these input dealers can become para-extension professionals by providing the required knowledge, they can professionalize extension services and help bring about a paradigm shift in Indian agriculture. It is in this context; The National Agricultural Extension Management Institute (MANAGE) had designed a training programme that provides relevant and location-specific agricultural education to equip these input dealers with sufficient knowledge to transform them into para- extension professionals.

All training interventions are expensive interventions. In order to benefit from investments in training, trainees must apply, generalize and maintain over time what they have learned in on-the-job training (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001). To assess the effectiveness of a training programme, participant feedback should be analyzed after the training is completed. This will allow the trainer to modify and improve the material for subsequent training. It can also identify gaps in training that need to be filled. In addition to the feedback received from trainees on the use and effectiveness of the training, self-assessment by the trainer is essential. Whenever training is given, the trainer should assess how he performed as a trainer and make adjustments before the next training program. Taking into account the above consideration, the effectiveness of the training programme was assessed in terms of the reaction of the learners to the training and learning that took place.

Methodology

One 48 days training programme for input dealers was organized at College of Agriculture, Nagaur, Rajasthan in 2020. The specific objective of training was to impart relevant and location-specific agricultural education to equip input dealers with sufficient knowledge to

transform them into para-extension professionals. In all 40 input dealers were trained. After training an evaluation study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of training. All 40 participants those who had were under went 48 days capacity building training programme were selected as respondent. All the respondents were asked to express their responses on a structured questioner. Training effectiveness was assessed in line with two levels of measurements (reaction measures and learning measures) suggested by Kirkpatrick (1987). Reaction measure was used to find out trainees' satisfaction with the training course. Post training success measure was used to measure training outcomes in terms of objective results. Respondents were personally interviewed using a well-structured and pre-tested interview schedule. The data thus collected were tabulated and statistically analyzed to interpret the results.

Results and Discussion

The College of Agriculture, Nagaur, Rajasthan organized a 48 days training to equip input dealers with sufficient knowledge to transform them into para-extension professionals. After the completion of the training all the trainees were asked to express their responses on a structured questioner. The responses of trainees were statistically analyzed and presented below:

Table 1 gives an account of trainee's opinion about the training conducted. It was encouraging to observe that majority of the trainees showed positive opinion regarding the conduct of training course in terms of subject matter coverage, information provided, and opportunities to lean new skill, enriched previous knowledge, latest technique, physical arrangement and over all Planning of training course. Similar results have been reported by Sharma *et al.* (2017) and Dhaka and Poonia (2009).

Table 1: Perception of trainees about the training course (N=40)

Particulars of training course	Response					
	Very good		Good		Average	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Subject matter coverage	27	67.5	8	20	5	12.5
Information provided	29	72.5	6	15	5	12.5
Opportunities to learn new skill	24	60	9	22.5	7	17.5
Enriched previous knowledge	26	65	8	20	6	15
Latest technique	19	47.5	12	30	9	22.5
Physical arrangement	31	77.5	9	22.5	0	0
Over all Planning of training course	32	80	6	15	2	5

An attempt was also made to see the perception of the trainees on the training methodology used. It was evident from Table 2 that all the trainees greatly appreciated the training

methodology employed during the training period. Similar findings have been reported by Sharma *et al.* (2017) and Dhaka and Poonia (2009).

Table 2: Perception of trainees about training methodology (N=40)

Particulars of training methodology	Response					
	Very good		Good		Average	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Participative approach	22	55	11	27.5	7	17.5
Skill demonstration	21	52.5	13	32.5	6	15
Recapitulation	26	65	8	20	6	15
Use of training aids	27	67.5	8	20	5	12.5
Discussion	22	55	11	27.5	7	17.5
Self practice	28	70	9	22.5	3	7.5
Field visit & visit to workshop	27	67.5	11	27.5	2	5
Question answer session	33	82.5	7	17.5	0	0

The aspects included in the training course were not necessarily be very new but should be delivered in right perspectives emphasizing its relevance. This reflects the performance of the resource persons. Data presented in Table 3 reveals that almost all the resource persons having high convincing power and had an impressive personality with very good communication skill. All the resource persons were

well prepared on their respective topic. Sound practical ability, maintenance of direct contact with the trainees with high degree of span of attention were also other characteristics of resource person which were highly rated by the participant of training. Similar results have also been reported by Sharma *et al.* (2017) and Dhaka and Poonia (2009).

Table 3: Perception about resource persons (N=40)

Particulars of resource persons	Response					
	Very good		Good		Average	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Preparation	22	55	11	27.5	7	17.5
Practical ability	26	65	11	27.5	3	7.5
Communication skill	26	65	11	27.5	3	7.5
Personality	19	47.5	13	32.5	8	20
Convincing power	18	45	13	32.5	9	22.5
Use of Teaching Aids	29	72.5	9	22.5	2	5
Span of attention	26	65	12	30	2	5
Direct contact maintenance	23	57.5	10	25	7	17.5

It was clear from the Table 4 that the training programme organized had significantly increased the knowledge and skill level of participants about various aspects of agricultural production, extension and rules and regulation and various schemes issues including agro-ecological situations, soil health management, seed and seed production, irrigation techniques and management, crop production technology of major crops, pest and disease control in agriculture, weed

management, extension approaches and methods. The results support the observation that participants were more confident and competent. The results so arrived might be due to the concentrated efforts made by the resource persons. Results are in line with finding reported by Balasubramani (2017), Sharma *et al.* (2017), Chinchmalatpure and Tayade (2016) and Dhaka and Poonia (2009).

Table 4: Influence of training on knowledge and skill level of the trainees (N=40)

Item	Mean Score				% increase in over pre-training score
	Possible maximum	Before training	After training	Mean difference	
Knowledge	50	15.27	41.53	26.26	171.97
Skill	30	9.32	22.17	12.85	137.88

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the training was effective in developing the technical competency of input dealers which would improve the quality of agricultural advisory services. The study reveals that the training programme helped the input dealers gain confidence in the diffusion of the technology. Therefore, during the post-training period, the input dealers should also receive continuous training to keep them abreast of the latest technologies and innovations in order to make them para-extension professionals.

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