

e-Extension: Connecting Farmers through Digital Technologies

K. Spandana Deepika, K. Dhanasree and Y. Shiva Naga Lakshmi

Department of Extension Education and Communication Management (EECM), ANGRAU, College of Community Science, Lam, Guntur - 522034.

Corresponding Email: spandanadeepika05@gmail.com

Agricultural extension plays a vital role in transferring knowledge from research institutions to farmers. With the rapid growth of information and communication technology (ICT), the traditional extension system is transforming into a modern, digital approach.

What is e-Extension?

e-Extension refers to the use of digital tools such as mobile phones, internet, computers, radio, television, and social media to deliver agricultural information and advisory services to farmers. It helps farmers access timely, accurate, and location-specific information without depending solely on face-to-face contact with extension workers.

Need for e-Extension

In many developing countries, including India, the number of farmers is very high compared to the number of extension personnel. This creates gaps in communication. The e-Extension programme helps to:

- Reach a **large number of farmers quickly**
- Provide **real-time information** on weather, pests, and markets
- Reduce **cost and time** of information delivery
- Improve **decision-making** at the farm level

Types of e-Extension Tools and Platforms

- 1) **Mobile Applications & SMS Services:** Provide weather forecasts, pest alerts, market prices, crop advisories, and training modules directly to farmers' phones.
- 2) **Web-based Portals:** Online platforms where farmers can access detailed advisory information, agronomic practices, training materials, and connect with experts.
- 3) **Interactive Voice/Call Systems:** Voice-based advisory systems allowing farmers to call and receive guidance in their language.
- 4) **Social Media & Online Forums:** Use of platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook groups by cooperatives or farmer groups to share information and coordinate activities.
- 5) **Web & Video-Based Training:** Video platforms help farmers learn best practices via demonstration videos.

Examples of e-Extension - Digital/ICT-Enabled Platforms

1. **Virtual Krishi Vigyan Kendra:** Connects KVK experts with farmers via SMS and voice. Provides expert-to-farmer (E2F) and farmer-to-expert (F2E) services through mobile and internet.
2. **e - Choupal:** ITC's internet-based initiative linking farmers directly with markets and advisory services. Provides real-time market information and procurement communication.
3. **eSagu:** Web-based personalised advisory system originally developed in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh Offers expert crop recommendations based on farmers' data.
4. **Direct2Farm (D2F) - Mobile Advisory:** CABI India's mobile-based advisory service delivering tailored SMS and voice messages to registered farmers. Helps farmers take up improved agricultural practices.
 - **AI and Conversational Agents: Digital Green** utilizes a multilingual AI chatbot to offer customized content and videos, supporting farmers in India.
5. **Full-Stack Farmer Platforms:** Platforms like DeHaat offer end-to-end services, including input linkage, financial advisory, and market linkages for outputs.
6. **Mobile-First Advisory & Diagnostic Apps:**
 - a. **Kisan Suvidha App:** Offers comprehensive information on weather, prices, and agri-advisories.
 - b. **MyAgriGuru:** Enables farmers to send crop images for rapid expert diagnosis.
 - c. **mKisan:** A government-run SMS portal for personalized, local-language updates.
 - d. **Plantix App:** Uses Artificial Intelligence to diagnose crop diseases through photos, gives instant solutions and recommendations.
 - e. **Kissan-Dost (AI + IoT chatbot):** Provides real-time advice using sensors and WhatsApp chatbot. Converts field data into simple guidance for farmers.

7. **Video & Community-Based Learning Platforms** Digital Green and similar initiatives (e.g., Access Agriculture) use high-impact, short, peer-to-peer videos for sharing best practices.

PlantVillage (Global platform) - Provides open-access agricultural knowledge and advisory tools

8. **Smart Market Access: eNAM (National Agriculture Market)** acts as an online trading platform to boost transparency and fair prices.

AGMARKNET: Provides real-time market price information across India

9. **IoT & Satellite Integration:** Recent advances include integrating geospatial technology and satellite data for crop management and drought forecasting.

10. **Weather & Climate Information Platforms: Skymet / IMD Digital Services** Provide real-time weather forecasts and alerts.

IBM Weather-based Advisory Systems: Help farmers plan irrigation, sowing, and harvesting, using sensor-based farming and real-time dashboards.

11. **Integrated Government Digital Platforms: AgriStack (India)** is for Digital database of farmers, land records, and crop data and helps in targeted subsidies, insurance, and advisory services.

- **APAIMS 2.0 (Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Information Management System)** -Provides AI-based pest alerts, subsidy services, and personalized advisories. Fully digitizes agriculture services in the state.

Contributions / Benefits of e-Extension

- **Improved Accessibility and Reach:** e-extension helps reach farmers in remote and underserved areas, breaking the barriers of distance and limited physical extension staff.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Digital services reduce operational cost compared to traditional extension

visits. Bulk SMS and mobile services can reach thousands of farmers at once.

- Farmers receive real-time weather forecasts, pest/disease alerts, input recommendations, and market price updates, enabling better decision makers.
- **Personalized and Localized Advisory:** Tailored recommendations based on location, language, crop type, and season improve relevance and adoption.
- **Enhanced Knowledge Sharing:** Online forums and social groups foster collaboration among farmers and between farmers and extension agents.
- **Scale and Speed:** Services such as Direct2Farm demonstrate how millions of messages can be delivered rapidly across states.

Challenges and Limitations

- **Connectivity & Infrastructure:** Poor internet and network issues in rural areas make access uneven or unreliable.
- **Digital Literacy Gap:** Limited digital skills among farmers and some extension workers reduce effective use of e-extension tools.
- **Two-Way Interaction Deficit:** Some services lack interactive feedback channels, making it difficult for farmers to ask questions or tailor advice.
- **Hardware and Costs:** Costs for smartphones, tablets, and data plans can be a financial barrier for both farmers and extension staff.
- **Quality of Content:** Ensuring that online content is reliable, context-specific, and actionable remains a challenge.

e-extension programmes are transforming agricultural extension by making it more accessible, timely, customized, and scalable. While they offer significant benefits in productivity, knowledge diffusion, and market access, challenges such as digital divide, infrastructure issues, and content relevance still need strategic solutions for wider impact.
