

LOOKING BACK- THINKING AHEAD
(Note on - Reforms in Agriculture department)

Our journey towards sustainable agriculture and shift from green revolution to "evergreen" revolution emphasizes a holistic approach. This write up details one of the components of this approach i.e., reforms in agriculture department.

Looking at recent past and present scenario, we have enough research findings - but still we are lagging behind in transfer of technology, fine tuning our research findings in terms of location specific technology and informing research department about farmer problems through some sort of backward linkages. On the other hand - Vagaries in climatic conditions, uncertainty for market opportunities, increased cost of cultivation, WTO implications created an alarming situation for farming community and henceforth necessitates a comprehensive and strategic road map. In fact, no farmer would like to see his/her offspring as a farmer and the efforts in the due course has increased the dependence on tenant farmers. As usual the tenant farmers, with low-income levels, are going for unscientific methods of agriculture. Finally we may be ending at losing our ground if the same situation continues.

I would appreciate you for inviting suggestions from various levels, which indicate your positive outlook. I am very optimistic and look forward many positive changes to occur in near future. With this presumption, I will try to put forth my ideas hereunder with different heads.

1. Infrastructure development and system based approach
 - Provision for better office space, mobility, training aids, communication system for employees
 - Building systems and operating as per standard operating procedures (SOP) and standard test procedures (STP)
 - Outsourcing functionaries such as employee counseling, surprise auditing, customer feed back survey etc., for unbiased outcome

2. Using IT for communication & training:
 - Shift from out dated and traditional ways of communication to latest modes of communication.
 - Minimizing paper work through online communication, which also fastens speed of communication. Up-to- date mandal level database shall be made online.
 - Immediate and easy access for latest and up-to-date weather reports
 - Intensive training to officers on latest topics like WTO implications, quality standards for agriculture exports, use of IT in agriculture, post harvest technology, value addition to agriculture products, managing change etc.,. Training program should be followed by post training evaluation by assigning relevant projects
 - Well equipped information centers: Establishing computer kiosks, maintaining decentralized information centers at each panchayat with minimum literature

- More emphasis on training of farmers by establishing well equipped training/ information centers at mandal level. Inviting Corporates/ private partnership in these areas.
 - Operationalize mobile training facilities (with documentaries, motion pictures, models etc.,)
3. Role refinement and empowerment of employees in general and Mandal Agriculture Officers (MAO) in specific:
- Empowering MAOs for financial resources, decision making etc.,
 - Assigning special projects of local interest to MAO's viz., thorough study of existing resources for alternative land uses, waste land development, scope for establishing agriculture based industries with locally available raw material as input etc.,
 - Reinforce best employees and special package for outstanding performance
 - Fast track promotion mechanism for outstanding employees
 - Counseling employees for better performance, to exploit their potentials, to find out areas of interest etc.,
 - Organizing annual meets for employees at district level and for best employees at state level
 - Employee associations shall be aiming at overall development of employees in terms of personal traits, effective job performance.
4. Identifying need based research opportunities
- Narrowing the inter phase between research and extension
 - Crop development teams as a linkage between research and extension, for showcasing and propaganda on best practices
 - Be party to need based research for more reliability during data collection, evaluation and also accountability during implementation
 - District level cross functionary (Research department- Extension department- Farmers) reviews on crop performance
 - Establishing scientific base for various ITK's and customized practices
5. Cropping strategy and extension based on marketing opportunities
- Preparing a dynamic data base on market information and continuous access for latest information on domestic/ export opportunities
 - Integration (fully/partially) of extension and marketing departments
 - Strengthening marketing department in terms of offering special price for organic products, testing labs for pesticide residues
6. More focus on local issues:
- Create a platform for accepting and understanding location specific problems (Eg., Issues surfaced during mandal review meetings, Janmabhoomi programs shall be discussed in appropriate forums)
 - Coherence with allied departments - Irrigation, marketing, veterinary, fisheries, forestry, horticulture etc., and representatives of these

departments shall periodically meet to address problems such as alternative land uses, resource conservation etc.,

- Designing location specific schemes

7. Quality control/ sampling:

- Can sampling be centralized and confined to manufacturing units coupled with random sampling at sale points by task force?
- Separation of quality control responsibility from extension department and appointing special teams to perform these duties
- Restriction on number of input outlets by imposing more license fee, minimum educational qualification for dealer/distributor etc.,
- Fine imposed for violation of rules should be more than cost of non compliance
- More attention to farmer samples
- Defining fine/ punishment parameters based on quantum of non compliance and identifying ways for quick imposition of fine
- Decentralized/ Mobile lab facilities for quick results

8. Making pesticide/fertilizer/seed companies responsible for corporate farming, for establishing information centers, testing labs, waste land development (especially in scarce rainfall areas) etc.,

9. Special emphasis on organic farming:

- Creating awareness on need for shift and propaganda on certification programs for organic agriculture
- Promotion of more sales of organic inputs (neem oil/ neem cake/ T.viridi/ NPV/ biological agents etc.) through government agencies and ensure availability of these inputs in time

10. Strengthening of extension system:

- Manpower: Assured services of MPEO's
- Promotion of private partnership in extension (similar to ATMA model)

11. Strengthening and motivation of farmers:

- Identifying best farmers and reinforcing them
- Constant motivation of RMG's and use this platform effectively
- Formation of farmers associations based on product and make them aware of domestic and export opportunities
- Inviting corporate companies for cooperative farming

12. Restructure of reporting hierarchy:

- MAO shall be directly reporting to district head and ADA's shall be assigned with special assignments such as random sampling; training; need based visits to pest outbreaks; research follow-ups with ARS's on location specific problems; RMG monitoring; farmer needs driven research and issues as indicated by MAO's.

- Easy access between employees and policy makers for sharing ideas, suggestions
13. Financial stability of department: Income generation through various means such as
- Operating seed production units at each mandal on contract basis that create self sufficiency in terms of seed requirement
 - Large scale production of biological agents, organic inputs
 - Becoming stake holder in agri based industries, processing units etc.,
 - Increasing license fee and fine for violation
14. Strategic / visionary approach:
- Aiming at long term and short term goals with a clear road map
 - Policy reforms in conjunction with other departments such as irrigation, forestry, veterinary, fisheries, horticulture etc.,
 - Information to all employees about department goals
 - Effective action plan at mandal level with special emphasis on local problems
 - Aiming at result oriented targets such as- Introduction of new crops, varieties; Increase in use of organic inputs; Decrease in cost of cultivation

Overall it demands infrastructure development, organizational restructuring and integration of various functionaries. The path towards sustainability is certainly not smooth, but it is inevitable and initiate our efforts towards this end is need of the hour.

This note is Prepared by:
M.Radha Madhav
Mandal Agricultural Officer
Sakhinetipalli- 533251
East Godavari district
Phone: 9440131030
Email: mrmadhav2001@yahoo.com