Agric. Res. J. Kerala 1988, 26 (2) 246—250

COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOUR OF NON-CONTACT FARMERS IN KERALA

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The Training and Visit (T & V) System of Agricultural Extension was introduced in 1981 in Trivandrum, Quilon and Alleppey districts of Kerala, on a pilot basis. This system according to Benor and Harrison (1972), is useful in demonstrating convincingly the importance of the concept of 'Communication of Innovation' in augmenting agricultural production, by selecting representatives from identified groups to serve as contact farmers. The various technologies generating from the research system are conveyed to the contact farmers through the extension system in the form of meaningful messages. If the contact farmers represent the range of socio-economic and farming conditions of the farming community to which they belong, the result of recommended practices adopted by them should convince most of the noncontact farmers of what can be achieved. Imitable contact farmers become demonstrators of introduced recommended practices and their example leads to wider adoption of these practices by the noncontact farmers. Obviously, the acid test for the success of the T & V system would be the extent of progress in farm production made by the noncontact farmers, who are the ultimate users of the technology. Although a number of studies have been conducted on the role of contact farmers, studies on noncontact farmers are hard to come by. Considering the crucial role of noncontact farmers in the T & V system of Agricultural Extension, a research study was undertaken to assess the communication behaviour of non-contact farmers in Kerala.

Materials and Methods

Trivandrum, Quilon and Alleppey districts, where the T & V system was introduced first in Kerala, were selected as the locale for the study. Four-stage random sampling method was used to select the respondents. Three sub-divisions, at the rate of one sub-division from each district, were selected at the first stage. In the second stage, one Agricultural Extension Unit from each of the selected sub-divisions was selected. In the third stage, five Agricultural Demonstrators were randomly selected from each of the Agricultural Extension Units and finally ten rice growing noncontact farmers from each of the Agricultural Demonstrator's area were randomly selected. Thus, a total of 150 farmers were selected for the study. But only 120 noncontact farmers could be interviewed and they constituted the sample for the study. The data were collected by interviewing the respondents individually with the help of a structured and pre-tested schedule developed for the purpose of the study.

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To measure the communication behaviour of noncontact farmers, four specific activities, viz., information receipt or input, information processing (consisting of information decoding and encoding) information communication or output and information feed back were taken into consideration. These four aspects were measured in terms of improved cultivation practices for rice since rice is the most important crop in the area.

Results and Discussion

I. Information input

The results on the pattern of the receipt of the technical information by the noncontact farmers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Information input pattern

Sl. No.	Source	Frequency*	Percentage	Rank
A.	*Interpersonal source*			
1	Contact farmers	798	30.89	2
2	Other farmers	1063	39.42	1
3	Agricultural Demonstrators	480	18.59	3
4	Junior Agricultural Officers	223	8.64	4
5	Agricultural Scientists	64	2.47	5
B.	*Mass media source*			
1	Farm broadcasts	720	25.72	2
2	Leaflets and bulletins	30	1.08	7
3	Newspapers	820	29.28	1
4	Agricultural Journals	310	11.07	4
5	Campaigns	10	0.35	8
6	Demonstrations	180	6.43	6
7	Seminars	300	10.72	5
8	Exhibitions	430	15.35	3

* The frequency exceeded the sample size since multiple responses were allowed.

It could be observed from Table 1 that the noncontact farmers received most of the technical information on rice cultivation from other farmers. The reasons for this phenomenon might be the easy access and the neighbourhood influence which helped them to gather new information. Among the mass media sources, 'newspapers' emerged as the most consulted information source. The obvious reason in this context could be the very high literacy rate and the regular

newspaper reading habit of the farmers in Kerala. Moreover, the Malayalam newspapers have a regular column on agriculture which helps the farmers to acquaint with the latest agricultural technology.

2 Information processing

The results relating to the information processing pattern of noncontact farmers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Information processing pattern percentage (n=120)

Sl. No.	Messages	Difficult		Neither difficult nor easy		Easy	
		Decoding	Encoding	Decoding	Encoding	Decoding	Encoding
1	M1	...	...	44.17	39.16	55.83	60.84
2	M2	...	...	39.17	35.00	60.83	65.00
3	M3	2.50	2.50	40.00	44.17	57.50	53.33
4	M4	...	...	42.50	50.00	57 50	50.00
5	M5	13.33	4.16	52.50	50.00	34.17	45.84
6	M6	10.83	4.16	55.83	41.66	33.34	54.16
7	M7	...	...	38.33	42.50	61.67	57.57
8	M8	1.67	0.83	36.67	35.83	61.67	63.34
9	M9	3.33	1.67	40.00	36.67	56.67	61.67
10	M10	3.33	0.83	40.00	36.67	56.67	62.50

The messages were on 1) Selection of high yielding varieties of seeds 2) Nursery preparation 3) Seed treatment 4) Seed rate and planting 5) Weed control of moncot weeds 6) Weed control of dicot weeds 7) Water management 8) Fertilizer application 9) Pest control measures 10) Disease control measures.

Table 3

Frequency of communication with different categories of farmers (n=120)

Sl. No.	Source	Frequency*	Percentage	Rank
1	Contact farmers	103	8.34	3
2	Other farmers	960	77.73	1
3	Farmers outside the village	172	13.93	2

* The frequency exceeded the sample size since multiple responses were allowed.

Table 4
Extent of feed back communication with different categories of information sources (interpersonal) by noncontact farmers (n = 120)

Sl.No.	Source	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Contact farmers	717	35.64	2
2	Other farmers	853	42.40	1
3	Agricultural Demonstrators	294	14.60	3
4	Junior Agrl. Officers	109	5.42	4
5	Agricultural Scientists	39	1.94	5

* The frequency exceeded the sample size since multiple responses were allowed.

it could be inferred from the results presented in Table 2, that the noncontact farmers expressed difficulty in decoding and encoding technical messages relating to weed control measures (M5 & M6), insect pests control (M9), disease control (M10), seed treatment (M3) and fertilizer application (M8). A probable reason for this may be that with increase in the complexity of technical content of the messages, both decoding and encoding processes became difficult. Most of the above messages involve much complex technical details relating to preparation of fungicides, pesticides or weedicides at correct doses and to be applied in the recommended manner. The results also pointed out that there was a latent relationship between decoding-encoding difficulty and the cost aspect implied in the messages. The messages M1, M2, M4 and M7 which pertain to low-cost technology are being perceived by the respondents as 'not at all difficult'. They are amenable for practice adoption after decoding and encoding.

3 Information communication or output

The data pertaining to the frequency of communication of technical messages by noncontact farmers to the different categories of farmers are presented in Table 3

It is evident from the data presented in Table 3 that the noncontact farmers communicated technical information to 'other farmers' of their own area more frequently. It could also be observed that a few farmers communicated technical information to the contact farmers also.

4. Information feed back

The data pertaining to the frequency of communication of feedback information with different categories of information sources by the non-contact farmers are presented in Table 4.

The results showed that the noncontact farmers communicated feedback information to 'other farmers' and 'contact farmers' more frequently. The possible reason may ba that a farmer seeks advice and clarification from the nearest source, which may be from a friend or neighbour living near to his home or farm. Moreover,

it is quite logical also since the noncontact farmers get most of the technical information from 'other farmers' and 'contact formers' as illustrated in Table 1. The low feedback with extension officials may be due to their low awareness about the T & V system which was quite new to the area. The result of the study emphasised that if effective communication is to take place In the T & V system, the selection of contact farmers should be based on the choice pattern of fellow farmers.

Summary

The research study conducted among selected noncontact farmers in Trivandrum, Quilon and Alleppey districts revealed that majority of the respondents received most of the technical information on rice cultivation from 'other farmers'. The study brought to light the increasing difficulty the noncontact farmers experienced in decoding and encoding the messages as their complexity increased. The noncontact farmers communicated technical information to 'other farmers' more frequently. Similarly, most of the feedback from the noncontact farmers was mainly communicated to 'other farmers, in their area.

References

Benor, Daniel and Harrison, James, Q. 1972. *Agricultural Extension: The Training and Visit System,* WorldBank, Washington, D. C.