

## Field Notes 3 (April 2020)



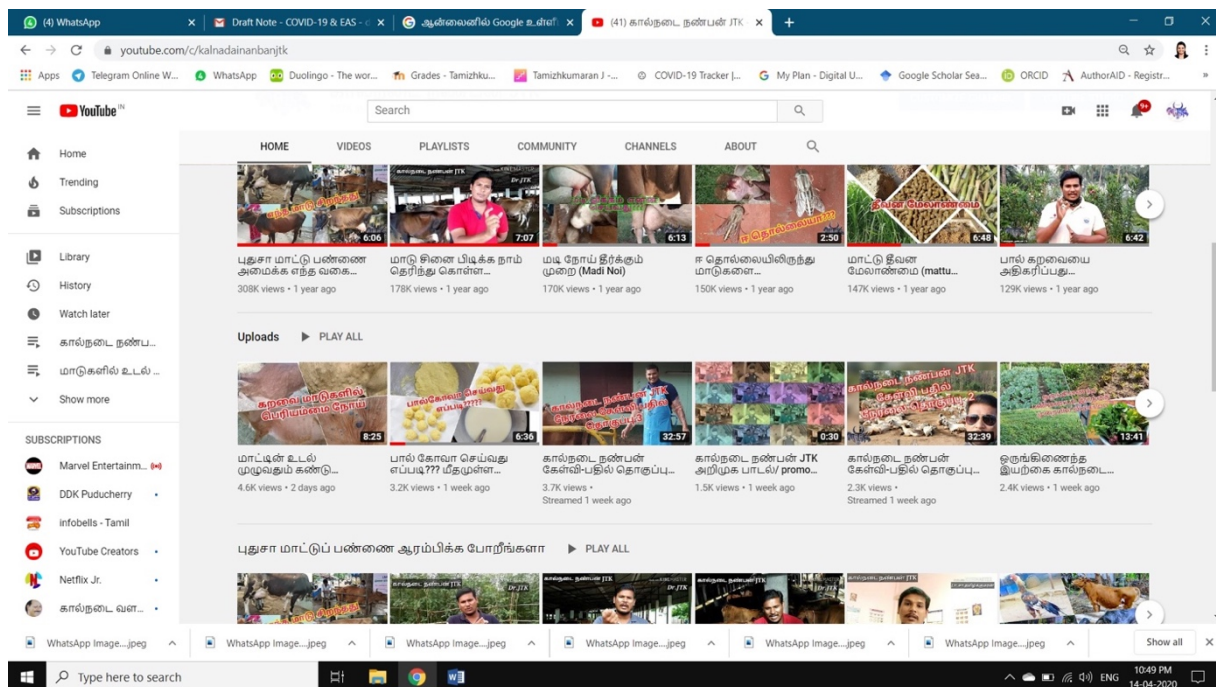
## USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ADVISE LIVESTOCK FARMERS IN INDIA DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN



*In this field practice note, Tamizhkumaran J and Saravanan Raj illustrate the use of social media in advising livestock farmers who face several new challenges from the current lockdown imposed to tackle the spread of Covid-19.*

### INTRODUCTION

The lockdown resulting from the impact of Covid-19 has been adversely affecting the livelihood of livestock farmers in several ways. Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) have to support farmers in dealing with their problems. Social media applications, especially YouTube and Telegram, can help livestock farmers during this lockdown period. I (Tamizhkumaran J) have been experimenting with the use of social media for providing advisories to livestock farmers since November 2016. I initiated a small WhatsApp group for this then and now it has grown into a global network with YouTube and Telegram.<sup>1</sup>



**Homepage of YouTube channel displaying the different playlist of Videos uploaded**

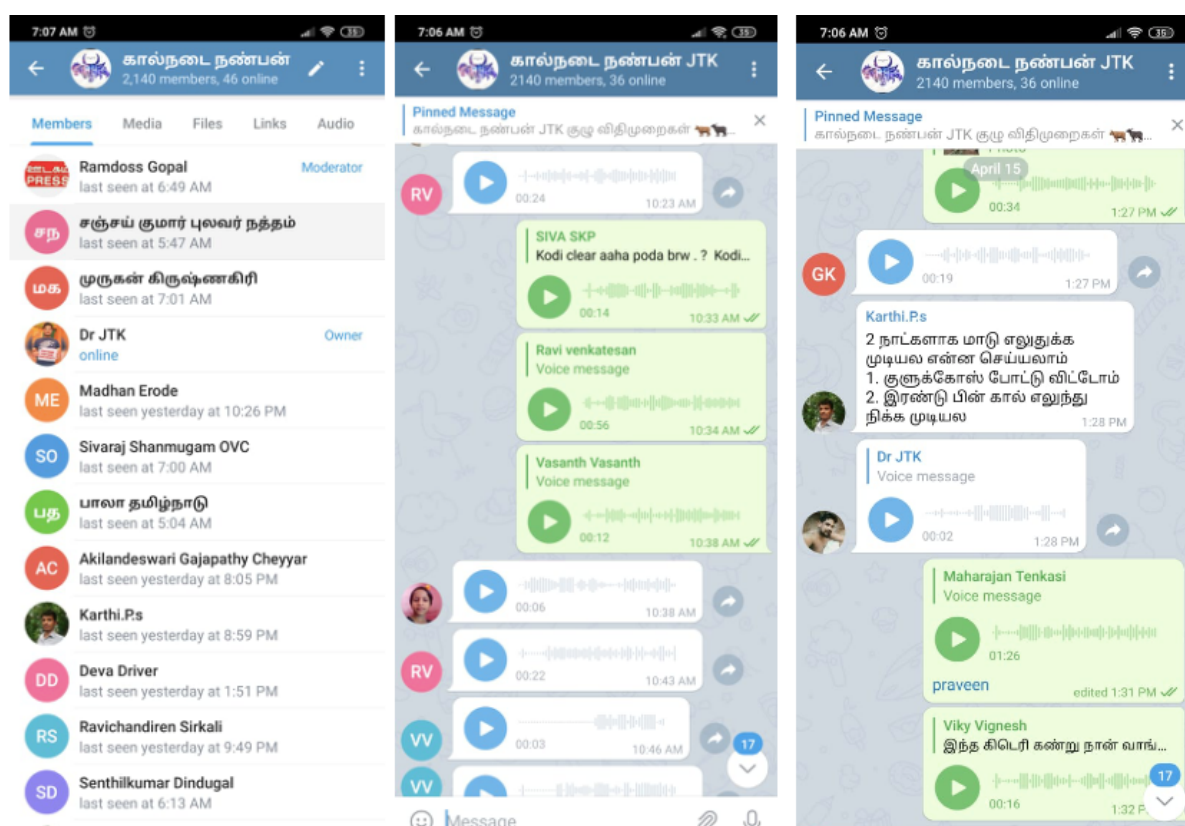
<sup>1</sup>Telegram is a Mobile app similar to that of WhatsApp but it has more options.

In this field note, I share some of my experiences in helping livestock farmers with EAS via virtual world. Livestock farmers in Tamil Nadu have been facing the following challenges during the lockdown period:

- Non-availability of veterinary services at their doorstep;
- Transport of both inputs like concentrates and all the livestock outputs;
- Restricted movement for grazing of animals;
- Difficulty in taking sick animals to veterinary dispensary due to restrictions;
- Increase in the price of concentrate feed;
- Stoppage of milk purchase by people for fear of contracting the disease.

## INTERVENTIONS

While working as a private large animal practitioner in the Indian State of Puducherry during 2016, I created a small WhatsApp group to share my knowledge among my clients. Many farmers joined the group subsequently (Box 1) and later a YouTube Channel was also created (Box 1).



*Telegram group chats showing the questions asked by the members and the respective answer given by the expert*

### Box 1. Experimenting with social media for livestock extension delivery

#### கால்நடை நண்பன் JTK Telegram Group

Started as a WhatsApp group in 2016, it later grew into 12 WhatsApp groups by 2019. Since it was a herculean task to handle all the 12 groups, a Telegram group was started by shifting all the members from WhatsApp to Telegram in 2020. The main aim of the group is to share information related to first aid and management techniques in livestock farming. The livestock owners in the group used to post their questions in the form of text, voice or video messages and the answers would be given to them by the experts in the group. The group has more than 2100 members from different parts of the world.

Farmers owning a few animals, small-scale dairy entrepreneurs, extension personnel and veterinarians are a part of this group. The members of the group were from different countries but had a common identity

through language (Tamil). Most of them were from Tamil Nadu. The other States from where members came were Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. They also hailed from other countries – United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Srilanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Kuwait, the USA and UK, etc.

#### **JTK YouTube channel – 127.6 K subscribers worldwide**

This YouTube channel was started in March 2018, to document the frequently asked questions repeated in the WhatsApp /Telegram group and share the answers to these questions through short videos. Videos on general management practices are also uploaded. These videos are produced and uploaded every week for the benefit of the group members. This group has more than 127,650 subscribers worldwide.

### **INTERVENTIONS DURING COVID-19**

#### **Understanding constraints**

To tackle the crisis situation faced by livestock farmers during Covid-19 a small group discussion was carried out on 03 April 2020, in the Telegram group to ascertain the constraints faced by them. It was then planned that the constraints could be solved by creating awareness and providing the required clarity on the existing situation/problem. A question was posted on the group in the form of a video – to ask them what the constraints were that they were experiencing during the lockdown period, and whether they have any suggestions to mitigate them? We received different constraints from the members.



*Interacting with my subscribers through YouTube Live streaming regarding Covid-19*

#### **Offering advice**

##### **Live-in Programme through YouTube (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/c/kalnadainanbanjtk>)**

After collecting facts about the Covid-19 lockdown from the group members we started providing advice through live-in-programme through YouTube channel. A total of 82, 137, and 93 participants joined the programmes on 5, 6 and 14 April 2020, respectively. It was decided to have a question and answer session on 4 April 2020, exclusively to address the constraints faced during the lockdown. The general queries from the livestock owners were also addressed. The session was planned for half an hour. On 14 April 2020, out of the 153+ questions, around 50+ questions/session were answered.

Live- in Programme links:

1. Programme-1: <https://youtu.be/7Z4Kxx4MkOQ>
2. Programme-2: <https://youtu.be/XqoE1Y21Cos>
3. Programme-3: <https://youtu.be/Nf0ZG4lw7Mw>

The problems and the suggested measures to be taken were discussed during the programme as discussed below:

#### **Constraint-1: Problem in transporting milk from farm to Dairy Cooperative Societies (DCS)**

Police were not allowing the peri-urban and urban dairy farmers in Villupuram and Salem district of Tamil Nadu to transport milk from their farm to DCS. A young educated entrepreneur was upset that he was not even considered as a livestock owner. The police were mocking him for trying to cheat them. He suggested that livestock farmers also be given vehicle passes by the DCS to transport the milk.

#### **Constraint-2: Disposal or sale of milk**

Police were not allowing livestock owners in Rettanai village, Villupuram district, and Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu to sell their milk in peri-urban and urban areas. As many farmers lost some of their regular customers they didn't know what to do with the excess milk which they had. So we thought we would help them utilize that excess milk by value addition. A few farmers even suggested that videos be made on these topics. So a video on value addition to liquid milk was also prepared with the help of the concerned experts and was circulated among the group to help farmers gain knowledge on value addition.

YouTube links to the video: Value addition during crisis time

1. Khoa preparation: [https://youtu.be/4UcoS0dJ\\_xE](https://youtu.be/4UcoS0dJ_xE)
2. Small Scale Milk Processing: <https://youtu.be/knsqW8DMPBc>
3. Make Paneer in Small Scale: <https://youtu.be/bBTogR5IGAQ>

#### **Constraint-3: Police not allowing the owners of sick animals to be taken to the Veterinary Dispensary**

One of the farmers tried to take his cow to the nearby dispensary for follow-up treatment. Police didn't allow him to go the veterinary dispensary. We could help him by negotiating and explaining the importance of the treatment to the police.

#### **Constraint-4: Discontinuance of milk purchase due to scare of corona**

A few of the consumers were not interested in buying milk from the farmers due to the scare of corona spread. We clarified their doubts on the spread of diseases. Requested them to follow hygienic practices.

#### **Constraint-5: Non-availability of veterinary services at their doorstep**

Generally the Artificial Insemination services are rendered by Lay Inseminators and Veterinarians are called only for clinical cases. Usually the minor cases are attended to by para veterinarians and quacks at the village level. Only for emergency cases do livestock owners seek the help of veterinarians. Due to the lockdown-imposed travel restrictions, the para veterinarians were unable to travel. Since then for every service, the livestock owners had to depend on veterinary assistant

surgeons. For a few of the emergency cases we could identify fresh veterinary doctors, who were willing to attend the cases on site, especially when it was too far for the livestock owners to take their animals to veterinary dispensaries.

#### **Constraint-6: Increase in the price of concentrate feed**

Many livestock farmers asked whether they can feed their animals with rice and wheat, as there was scarcity in concentrate feed and increase in the price of the available feed. Proper feeding suggestions were given based on the questions.

In general, we could clear the doubts on how to feed the livestock during the crisis period, how to get the e-pass, preventive measure to be carried out to reduce the spread of corona virus etc. In addition, they were made aware of the present crisis and their responsibility as a citizen during this crisis time. We also advised them to maintain social distance whenever they come out for grazing, care of animals, or sale of produce.

### **IMPACT**

Advice provided through the Telegram group was effective enough to clear the doubts of livestock farmers. The first aid advice was of great help to livestock owners, although it was a routine practice of the group. Advice during this crisis situation was much more useful as they don't have many other means to seek professional advice. We could identify the stakeholders and share their contact details with the group members. We could even identify young veterinarians who were really interested in helping livestock farmers during this crisis by attending to the emergency cases.

### **LESSONS**

Livestock owners are more interested in the YouTube Live-in programme. When asked, "Should we organise this programme daily during this lock down period?", many answered "yes" and a few even wanted to increase session duration as well. This itself is a clear indicator that advice through social media can play a huge role during the Covid-19 lockdown. Social media, especially YouTube, plays a great role in this context.

#### **Box 2. Questions raised by livestock farmers via YouTube/Telegram group**

Questions related to Covid-19 lockdown

1. Does Corona spread to animals?
2. Does Corona spread through milk/egg/meat?
3. Do animals get Corona? If yes, what should be done?
4. Do animals also exhibit symptoms like human beings if they have Corona?

Questions related to Livestock rearing

We got around 153 question on YouTube Live-in Programme and we get around 30-40 questions in Telegram group daily. Only the major topics are listed here:

1. How to control parasite infestation in livestock;
2. How to rectify infertility in cows;
3. Feeding management of livestock;
4. How to control Lumpy Skin Diseases.

The livestock owners are satisfied with the timely advisory services provided to them through social media. They have learnt how to get an e-pass for transporting livestock produce and have understood the importance of hygienic management practices. We tracked the adoption of feeding



practices recommended during the interactions and several farmers reported that they have modified the feeding pattern given the available feed and fodder. They have realised the importance of saving the animal during this crisis situation more than sustaining the milk production. Many farmers got some moral support while participating in the live-in programme. Over 1000 subscribers and 250+ group members have joined our social network after we started this initiative.

The social media tools can surely help livestock farmers to communicate beyond borders and seek advice.

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