

INEFFICIENT EXTENSION SERVICES: LIVESTOCK OWNERS BEAR THE BRUNT



Today there is nothing like livestock extension in the country. Its necessity is neither recognized by the policy makers nor demanded by the livestock owners. The resultant knowledge gap has been leading to several serious consequences, not only for livestock owners but for the society at large, argue, Dr S V N Rao and Dr K Natchimuthu.

CONTEXT

Livestock owners need three types of (integrated) support:

1. *Extension and advisory services* (to enrich the knowledge and improve the skills of livestock owners)
2. Availability and accessibility of *input service* such as semen, vaccines, medicines, equipments, instruments, feed etc and
3. Delivery of the *technical service* by the veterinarian (Vet) or Para-Veterinarian (Para-Vet).



In general, the delivery of extension and advisory services cannot stand alone as it depends upon the other two i.e. input service and technical service. The livestock owners need the help of a vet or Para-Vet for getting their animals inseminated, diagnosed for pregnancy, dewormed,

vaccinated, treated etc. As is well known, a field vet is supposed to perform all the three services but his focus is mainly on breeding and treatment of animals. His role as extension advisor is totally neglected as it is neither demanded by the livestock owners nor by his superiors. In India, the livestock owners as well as the information providers do not value information, whereas they prefer to receive services such as Artificial insemination, treatment etc. even on payment basis as these result in visible immediate benefits.

Livestock owners are ready to pay for door step delivery of breeding and treatment services (Ahuja et al, 2008) but not for extension and advisory services (Sangameswaran, 2014) . The net result is that the knowledge of the livestock owners on scientific management of livestock is very poor. Today there is nothing like livestock extension in the country. Its necessity is neither recognized by the policy makers nor demanded by the livestock owners. A cursory glance at the Report of the Working Group on Animal Husbandry and Dairying for the 12th Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 2012) and the website of the National Dairy Plan (<http://www.nddb.org/ndpi/English/Pages/NDPI.aspx>) will clearly reveal this. The irony is that many of our extension professionals have also failed to impress upon the policy makers on the significance of the livestock extension and advisory provision.

SEVERAL ACTORS, BUT NO EXTENSION

Though several actors are present in the livestock sector, there is very little extension.

Department of Animal Husbandry (DAH), the main service provider in all the states is not practically involved in extension and advisory service delivery. It never considers it as its responsibility as evidenced by the meaning it attaches to extension (delivery of inputs) and the paltry sum allocated to the extension work (Ravikumar and Chander (2006); Chander, 2013). Even the breeding and health care services are focused largely on cattle and buffaloes (owners are also interested and willing to pay for these services), restricted only to vaccinations that too during outbreaks (in case of sheep and goat) and almost nil in case of backyard poultry, (except Ranikhet disease vaccination at the dispensary). Pigs are never on its agenda, except in Goa and north eastern states. Although DAH has a wider net work in the states, its effective reach is limited to only few villages around the veterinary dispensary/hospital. In many states the vet is losing his/her technical identity as he is being involved in non technical activities such as feed distribution, purchases of animals, identification of beneficiaries of various schemes, maintenance of several records etc.

Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) is considered as a centre for transfer of technology in a district for all the agricultural technologies which include crops, livestock, horticulture etc.



More than half of the 641 KVKs do not have animal science Subject Matter Specialist (SMS). Even in KVKs where the SMS (Animal Science) is available, he/she doesn't have the support to conduct on- farm trials of different technologies in different species of animals. The focus thus remains on training of farmers (mostly on campus) with little impact on skill development.

Dairy cooperatives have been very successful in delivery of all the three services in few states, where the milk procurement is linked to a fleet of vets whose services are accessible to the dairy farmers (24 X7). Of late in many milk unions, these services are not available to the member producers (Chander and Sulaiman, 2014). With deterioration in finances, they are losing their market share to private agencies. The private milk dairies also focus on milk procurement but not on extension and advisory service (Sangameswaran, 2014).

NGOs such as BAIF have been quite successful in delivery of services (mainly breeding and training) as they maintain a close contact with the livestock owners. Their success is attributed to the dedicated leaders and committed staff, but their impact is restricted to only few pockets.



Integrators, for instance in the “contract poultry farming” have made inroads especially in southern states mainly because of the integration of supply of inputs (chicks, feed, vaccines, extension advisory services, disease diagnosis, vaccinations, deworming, etc.) by the integrators with the labour and facilities provided by the poultry farmers (shed, electricity, water, litter etc). All the three services viz. supply of inputs, extension advisory and technical service are provided by one agency i.e. integrator. The integrator also collects the eggs, and or birds for marketing. The ability of the poultry farmers in rearing chicks with zero mortality is mainly due to the appropriate use of all the above services. At the end of the production period, the farmer is going to get a fixed amount as rearing charges.

Though considered exploitative, the integrated poultry farming is gaining more popularity as the farmers are free from investment, production and marketing risks (Rao et al., 2011). The farmers are taking care of the disease risk as millions of birds are being reared in several locations and the chances of spread of diseases in all the locations is bare minimum when compared to rearing all the birds in one location by the integrator. This also facilitates the easy marketing of the product for the integrators in different locations.

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR KNOWLEDGE

With virtually no extension support, livestock owners lack knowledge to deal with a number of challenges they face and as a result they are incurring huge losses. This knowledge poverty is resulting in losses with far reaching consequences for the society.

Public health concerns: Livestock owners usually sell their sick or dead animals to butchers thus contributing to the spread of important zoonotic diseases, such as Anthrax, Brucellosis, TB, Salmonellosis etc. Most of the farmers are not aware that the animal suspected to be died of Anthrax must be disposed off through deep burial. Due to ignorance, the livestock owners either throw the carcass near the river beds or sell or consume the meat leading to serious public health concerns. The carcass should not be even opened as it results in spore formation leading to the exposed area becoming endemic to Anthrax which is of zoonotic importance.

Economic loss to the cattle owners: The dairy farmer has to take the cow in proper heat for better conception through AI and for this he or she must know the symptoms of heat in a cow and skill in identifying a cow in heat. If he takes the cow in early or late heat the chances of conception will be low and he has to wait for another 21 days for the next heat. Similarly, the cow which was inseminated 3 or 4 times and not conceived need to be examined by a Vet. The dairy farmers due to their poor knowledge keep on getting their cows inseminated to check their luck. In the absence of proper extension and advisory service, the dairy farmers will be losing because of the increased dry period (not in milk).

Low adoption of preventive services: Prevention is better than cure. But this is rarely followed. Preventive measures such as deworming and vaccination must be followed regularly to reduce avoidable losses through mortality and morbidity. As the impact or benefits of deworming and vaccination cannot be observed (even in future) by the livestock owners, they do not consider it necessary to know about the deworming and vaccination schedules. Both the livestock owners and vets plunge into action during disease out breaks. Under normal situation, neither the livestock owners demand such preventive services nor does the DAH proactively deliver such cost effective services. The net result is that most of the animals are not under the protective vaccination umbrella.

Cash input vs non cash inputs: The livestock owners are reluctant to use cash inputs to improve the economy of their farms. The goat owners (resource poor) prefer grazing (non cash input) to feeding with concentrates (cash input) though the former practice requires more time to increase the body weight of the goats. Similarly, the dairy farmers also prefer to allow their



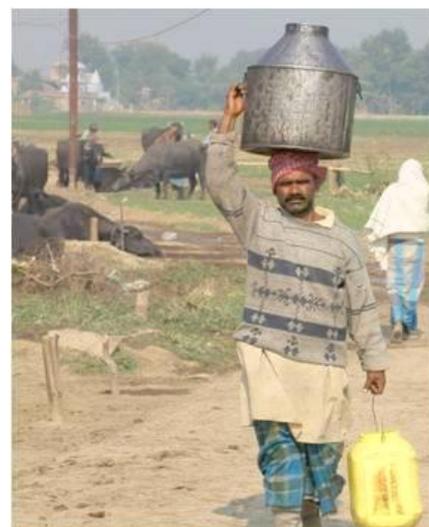
animals for grazing to get 2 or 3 litres of milk rather than feeding with concentrates to get more milk, though the later is economically profitable to practice.

Exploitation by middlemen: The middlemen or brokers exploit the livestock owners whenever the livestock owners are interested to purchase or sell their animals due to their poor knowledge. Majority of the farmers do not know the characteristics they look for while purchasing animals or the market value of the live animal or product they wish to sell. This exploitation could be noticed especially during the implementation of Government schemes, namely, distribution of milch cows, goats, sheep, poultry, etc. In most cases, the purpose for which the animals are distributed (to create livestock assets for improving the livelihoods) is defeated as the animals are sold before realizing their potential.



Lack of awareness about efficient and transparent marketing methods: The milk producers in most of the dairy co-operative societies know that testing of milk is not done transparently and thus is leading to several malpractices. The Automatic Milk Collection Unit (AMCU) which is a transparent system to assess the value of the milk is not used in many dairy co-operative societies. Unfortunately, majority of the member producers are also not aware that they are the owners of the dairy co-operative societies and their milk union is empowered to establish such AMCUs in the societies.

Ignorance about the negative consequences of technologies: Most often than not, the researchers highlight the advantages (known) of their technologies without explicitly indicating the negative consequences (known or unknown) of adoption of such technologies. The dairy farmers are usually given the information that crossbred cows give more milk than local cows but under what conditions is not revealed to them. Crossbred animals (cows, goats, sheep, poultry etc) need quality feed and management for better performance. These animals being more susceptible to diseases need better health care. Superior technologies need quality inputs and services. The crossbred cow milk is quite often rejected in the societies as it contains less fat and SNF (Solids Not Fat) than the prescribed standards (Rao et al., 2011).



Poor market information: The livestock owners must know when, where, whom and how to sell (or purchase) their animals or products. When they are ignorant about this vital

market information, they may incur losses or gain less profits. They must know the source, availability, prices etc of both inputs and outputs which enable them to take appropriate decisions in purchase of inputs and sale of products. Wherever, the dairy coops are functioning efficiently, the dairy farmers are aware of the milk procurement and feed prices. Similarly, the National Egg Coordination Committee provides regular updates on the prices of eggs and chicken. But in all the other cases the livestock farmers are in dark. Likewise there are several critical areas where accurate, reliable and timely information plays an important role in enabling the farmers to take appropriate decisions leading to better economy of their farms.

WAYS FORWARD:

1. The three important services, namely, education of farmers (extension advisory), supply of inputs and technical services must be delivered by one agency as it facilitates better coordination.
2. The extension professionals need to conduct on-farm trials in different farming system locations. They also must keep abreast with the changing scenarios in livestock farming systems which need entirely different extension approaches. For instance, changes are taking place in types of feeding (extensive to intensive; grazing to stall feeding), type of farming (subsistence to commercial); product orientation (layers, broilers or mixed); market structure (co-operative to corporative; public sector to private sector); type of product (raw form to processed to ready to eat) and increasing demand for livestock products.
3. There is nothing like a standard package of practices suitable for all farming locations. It is the responsibility of the extension professionals to identify and advise the livestock owners based on field trials which must be conducted in a systematic way with the active involvement of the livestock owners. This requires adequate staff and appropriate budgetary allocations.
4. The DAH in most states face shortage of both vets and Para-Vets and this needs to be addressed. While giving utmost importance for performing deworming and vaccinations in protecting the livestock wealth, they should also educate the livestock owners through appropriate extension teaching methods to enhance their knowledge and skills on various aspects of livestock rearing.



5. The Veterinary Council of India (VCI), the apex body to regulate the minimum standards for Veterinary education in the country must assess the needs of the livestock owners, and ways and means to address these needs through appropriate curriculum development.



Our previous blogs on this theme

1. Dr S V N Rao and Dr. K Natchimuthu. **Quantity Vs Quality: The great dilemma of livestock research**, AESA Blog No.38, (available at <http://aesagfras.net/Resources/file/Blog%2038.pdf>)
2. Dr D V Rangnekar. **Livestock extension-need for a paradigm change**, AESA Blog No.32, (available at <http://aesagfras.net/Resources/file/Blog%2032%20May%202014.pdf>)
3. Dr S V N Rao. **Skill development in Veterinary Education**, AESA Blog No.14 (available at <http://aesagfras.net/Resources/file/Blog%2014%20Skill%20development%20in%20Veterinary%20Education.pdf>)
4. Dr S V N Rao. **Why Collaboration Matters for Livestock Development?**, AESA Blog No.6, (available at <http://aesagfras.net/Resources/file/Blog%206%20Why%20collaboration%20matters.pdf>)
5. Dr Mahesh Chander. **Beyond treatment and breed improvement**, AESA Blog No.1, (available at <http://aesagfras.net/Resources/file/Blog%201-Beyond%20treatment%20and%20breed%20improvement.pdf>)

6. The academic centres (veterinary universities / colleges, ICAR institutes, KVKs, NGOs etc) can play an important role in improving the capacity of the faculty, vets, SMSs etc in conducting on farm trials on different technologies, the result of which form basis for making appropriate recommendations to the livestock owners for wider adoption (in their locations or regions) as well as to the concerned researchers to refine the technologies.
7. It is not enough to highlight the importance of extension in improving the livelihoods of the livestock dependent families. It must be supported with a clear cut policy with concomitant programmes and budgetary allocation. Unless the policy frame work is translated into the programmes of the concerned departments/ institutions, the policy sounds hollow.

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