

PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCEMENT OF SRI LANKAN DAIRY FARMERS THROUGH TRAINING



Extension faculty should help students gain sound practical experience so that they become good extension professionals. Extension Majors of University of Peradeniya, Kandy, Sri Lanka recently organized a training on 'Productivity Enhancement of Sri Lankan Dairy Farmers' as part of their course-work. Ms. Kumudu Ariyawanse shares this indelible experience!

CONTEXT

Sri Lanka has an agriculture-based economy. Integrated crop and livestock production systems have been the backbone of country's economy, which also provides livelihoods to nearly 80% of its rural population. Apart from paddy and plantation crops, the dairy industry has potential to contribute considerably to Sri Lanka's economic development, while playing an important role in alleviating nutritional poverty. However, the progress in expansion of the dairy industry is not as satisfactory as compared to other sub-sectors of agriculture in Sri Lanka.

Aspirations and needs of communities change with the advancement of technology, economic transformation and commercialization. The rural dairy farmers in Sri Lanka do not seem to have benefited from the opportunity of adapting to these changes at an equal pace unlike the other sectors. Therefore, extension and advisory services (EAS) have to play a pivotal role to meet the new challenges by strengthening the capacity of the dairy sector. The public and private EAS needs to deliver a more prominent and effective service to underserved smallholder farmers.



Productivity Enhancement Training (PET) for dairy farmers

Realizing this context, the Department of Agricultural Extension of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, conducted a two-day 'Productivity Enhancement Training' program for selected rural dairy farming communities in *Boraluwewa* and *Pannala*, the North Western Province of Sri Lanka. Four final year undergraduate students majoring in Agricultural Extension conducted the program under the guidance of the academic staff and in collaboration with 'Fonterra Brands Lanka Private Limited', a leading dairy firm in the country. Fonterra facilitated the identification and access to the target dairy farmer groups supplying milk to two collecting centers located in the North Western province. Fonterra training and demonstration farm at Pannala is equipped with proper housing units, shed management and animal welfare. This training center can accommodate around 400 farmers for training programmes and workshops. It also serves as a knowledge and technology distribution hub for dairy farmers by contributing towards improving the dairy production and with futuristic production technologies for the dairy farming communities.

Pre-training activities

Capacity development of trainers

The students and trainers underwent a preparatory workshop. It provided the participants with insights on conducting farmer trainings, adult learning principles, extension training methodology and dairy technologies. This helped them understand and address the prioritized needs of the dairy farmers with the ultimate goal of enhancing their productivity. In addition, the participants were exposed to the production and use of multimedia extension tools including an instructional video documentary on 'Silage production' depicting a success story of a local dairy farmer, supported by Fonterra.



Exposure visits to Saga University of Japan helped the participants explore new vistas of agricultural development. The productivity enhancement training program also included a visit to the Rural Immersion Program in Madurai, India.

Design/development of training tools

Designing of training tools was done with the guidance of specialists from the Department of Agricultural Extension, Department of Animal Science of the University of Peradeniya and Fonterra. Guidance on developing training session plans comprising of simplified technical messages with the objective of enhancing the productivity of local small-scale farmers was

provided. Other training tools developed included power-point slides, flip charts, live specimens of fodder & pasture and advisory leaflets.

Use of participatory tools in training for need assessment

A familiarization visit to the area was initially undertaken to observe the existing situation of the communities. A two-day interactive session conducted using participatory methods such as transect walks and focus group discussions helped the participants identify the training needs of the selected communities. A short questionnaire helped test the level of knowledge levels and the attitude of the dairy farmers towards technology adoption.

Identification of problems and needs was followed by prioritizing the training needs based on four criteria viz. severity of the problem, long-term effect on sustainability of the production system, availability of resources and relevance of training as a solution to the particular issue. The topics selected for the training of four student participants are:

- a. Feeding and Balanced nutrition supply to dairy cattle
- b. Importance of roughage, drinking water and silage production
- c. Record keeping in a dairy farm and
- d. Dairy animal welfare

Training Programme

After elaborate preparations and a series of rehearsals, the PET program was conducted in two consecutive days covering two topics each. One was conducted in the village community center in remotely located 'Boraluwewa' and the other in Fonterra Training Center, Pannala. About 25 farmers participated at each location.

Each student (trainer) conducted individual sessions of approximately one hour in the presence of the technical experts who helped the trainers to handle difficult questions from the farmers.



My Session

Topic of my session was 'Importance of roughages and drinking water to improve milk production of dairy cattle, and silage production'. The training was divided into three parts:

- i) Importance of selecting, growing and providing quality fodder to dairy cows
- ii) Importance of plenty of good quality drinking water
- iii) Small scale silage production

An interactive Q&A session was also conducted at the end of the training programme. Farmer questions were answered by specialists from Fonterra and the academic staff from the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya.



Farmers also provided suggestions on the improvement of the existing governmental extension services/schemes, which should be incorporated in order to facilitate the development of dairy industry. The support extended by Fonterra for uplifting rural dairy farming was greatly appreciated by the farmers.

Use of multimedia/video as a training tool proved successful, as farmers showed a keen interest in watching and understanding a video on silage production, successfully adopted by a farmer in similar conditions as themselves. This farmer was also present in the audience and shared his experiences which helped in convincing the participant farmers after the training.

A preliminary evaluation at the end of each training session was conducted by collecting feedback and analysis of this feedback revealed that the participants were highly satisfied with the learning from this event.

Lessons Learnt

This PET program enabled the students to gain an enriching experience of methodically disseminating knowledge and technology to rural agricultural communities. This has now enabled them to understand how to overcome challenges and barriers, mix and communicate with local communities, understand the real needs of communities and realize the responsibility of applying their knowledge to uplift the living standards of rural farmers.

The program was evaluated by a panel of academic staff and resource persons from Fonterra and their feedback has proved to be very useful in understanding and addressing the challenges faced. We are also convinced that this unique experiential learning activity would immensely help us in our future careers as extension agents.

In addition, this was a rare opportunity to bring together the academia, students, public and private sector stakeholders and the local people to contribute for the transformation of 'rural dairy farmer' into an 'empowered, equipped dairy entrepreneur' through capacity building and productivity enhancement.

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