

Dr A K Singh recently joined as Deputy Director General (Agricultural Extension), at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). He reflects on the tasks & challenges ahead in an interview to Dr Mahesh Chander, the AESA focal point for India.



Dr Singh, Congratulations and how do you feel at your selection to this very important position?

Thanks to you and AESA. It is actually a much bigger responsibility and I feel happy and I am finding this position more challenging.

What are the most important priorities of the ICAR Extension Division currently?

The most important task is strengthening and expanding the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) network. Orienting extension education research and implementing two new projects – Farmer FIRST and ARYA (Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture) are the other important tasks.

The Farmer FIRST is proposed to be launched with an objective of enhancing farmer– scientists interface for technology application and continued feedback. 100 centres (ICAR/SAUs) will implement this project involving 1000 farm families at each location. The major components would be i) Farmers – scientists interface, ii) Technology assemblage, application and feedback, iii) Partnership with different stakeholders and iv) Content mobilization. ARYA is basically an attempt to bring in entrepreneurship in youth through skill development and empowerment. KVKs, research centres and state agricultural universities will implement this project.

Farmers in India in general face a large number of challenge and so extension has to deal with issues beyond dissemination of technology. How your division is going to respond to these new challenges?

Beyond technologies, farmers currently need information, support and services related to market, insurance, nutrition, environment, weather, etc. The Division of Agricultural Extension will address these issues by strengthening KVKs with Subject Matter Specialists that can deal with these issues. Post harvest, value addition, diagnostics, climatic change and women empowerment are important future thrust areas.

Financing and managing KVKs is perhaps one of the most important functions of your Division? How challenging is this especially with the rapid increase in the number of KVKs in recent years?

We have 641 KVKs (Farm Science Centres) currently and this number is expected to go up to 751 by the end of the XII Plan. The Central Government is keen to continue its funding to the KVKs, which in a sense is an extended arm of research engaged in technology assessment & refinement, demonstration of new technologies and also working as knowledge and resource centre at the district level. For monitoring the performance of KVKs, various systems are being put in place including periodic reviews by

Division of Agricultural Extension, ICAR

Agricultural Extension division is one of the most important divisions under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). The division is headed by the Deputy Director General (Agricultural Extension), who is supported by 2 Assistant Director-Generals. The major activities of Agricultural Extension Division are assessment, refinement and demonstration of technology/products through a network of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs). This division coordinates & monitor 44 Agricultural Technology Information Centres (ATIC) established at the ICAR institutes and State Agricultural Universities.

committees and programme oriented monitoring. The KVK is the only technology led Institution at the district level and it needs convergence with all the other stakeholders to support technology promotion programmes implemented at the district level. We hope KVKs will also receive funding support and other resources to play these roles more effectively.

One of the criticisms of the KVKs is that many lack adequate operational funds? Do you believe so? If so, how are you going to address this?

During the XIIth Plan, we are envisaging higher operational funding and enhanced linkages with other organisations. The special programmes (Farmer First and ARYA) being initiated currently will also add more resources to the KVKs.

How can you increase more collaboration between ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency) and KVKs?

A mechanism is already in place for strengthening linkages between the two. Further, a Joint Action Plan that focus on technological support by KVKs to the Block Technology Team (BTT) of ATMA and BTTs taking the lead in technology dissemination to a wider area, is being developed to enhance collaboration.

How do you see the need for strengthening extension research in the country? Will the proposed co-ordinated research project on Agricultural Extension address this issue?

Extension research has to be given due emphasis. Coordinated Research Project is one way to address this issue. The platform of Farmer FIRST intends to provide a platform to extension scientists of SAUs and Institutes to take up research programmes and show their relevance.

How do you see the contradictions between "extension research" and "extension work" (promotion of institute technologies) in the ICAR institutes where the boundaries between the two are not very clear and this leading to frustration among extension scientists?

Even while doing extension work, the scientists can carry out extension research. But this is mostly an issue of motivation, self realization and keenness on the part of an individual scientist to identify his primary role as researcher. At the same time, opportunities also need to be provided by the institutes to undertake more research programmes by the extension scientists and their performances evaluated on those parameters. Coordinated research programmes will definitely lead to capacity development of extension scientists associated with it.

Frontline Extension System

Three Approaches

- 1. Special transfer of technology programmes like National Demonstration, Operation Research Project, and Lab-to-land Programme, Institute-Village Linkage Programme for technology assessment and refinement**
- 2. KVKs on the principle of 'learning by doing'. Frontline extension programmes (ND, ORP, LLP) are incorporated into the KVKs**
- 3. ICAR/SAU system provides training to the master trainers (subject matter specialists) working in the state line department through monthly workshops**



Is there something do you like to do on reviewing and strengthening extension curricula? Any plans to have a look at it?

The curriculum has to be dynamic and as this subject is the main domain of the Division of Agricultural Extension, we would like to have a collective view on this from all the learned extension professionals.

Livestock and Fisheries extension haven't got the deserved attention so far? Do you think the KVKs are trying to address this issue?

Livestock and Fisheries are key constituents of small holder agriculture. With more experts in these areas joining the KVKs, we hope to see more intensive efforts on this in the future.

We believe you are aware of the efforts of the GFRAS (Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services) and the AESA (Agricultural Extension in South Asia) in strengthening extension? How do you see these efforts? Is there a way to get the ICAR Extension Division more involved in these activities?

Both GFRAS and AESA are providing a very useful platform for extension professionals to interact, share and learn about new concepts and approaches in extension and advisory provision, experimented and practiced worldwide.

The Division of Agricultural Extension will definitely like to enhance its ties with such organisations who are working in this field.

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Agricultural Extension in South Asia

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