

Agricultural Extension in South Asia

### TAILORING RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES FOR FAMILY FARMS

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FAO and GFRAS (2016)  
Pages: 54; ISBN 978-92-5-109257-6



Family farming is a predominant form of farming in various countries around the globe. Considering its importance, the year 2014 was declared as the International Year for Family Farming (IYFF) by the United Nations.

This policy paper by FAO and GFRAS “Tailoring Rural Advisory Services for Family Farms” has been published at the right time when the academicians, researchers, scientists, students, policy makers and other stakeholders are looking for new and better ways of supporting family farms. The policy paper has been carefully structured covering different aspects of family farming. The paper begins with very compelling evidence about the extent of family farming in the world. To make the reading easier, the book is divided into chapters covering various facets of family farming.



Presence of family farming in different countries is depicted in the chapter on *What is Family Farming?* The chapter on special feature of family farming not only describes its characteristics but also the challenges faced by the family farms. Though this chapter covers the topic exhaustively, it would have been better if some special characters of family farming of different countries could have been added to this chapter. It would then have provided the readers with a comparative analysis among the different types family farming practiced in various countries.

The chapter on *Rural Advisory Services and Family Farms* clearly articulates the need for tailoring the advisory services to the demands of family farms. It gives us immense pleasure to see that much emphasis in the book is given on the main two chapters namely gaps within Rural Advisory

Services (RAS) in supporting family farms and addressing the gaps in RAS to support family farms. Generally, we tend to describe the problems without giving much thought on strategies to tackle the problems. This policy paper has done remarkably well in both these aspects.

In the chapter on *Gaps within RAS in Supporting Family Farms*, the authors argue for capacity development of RAS at all the three levels namely individual, organizational and the enabling environment. The following weaknesses in RAS along with other important limitations at these levels have been described:

- weak links among the various actors in the agriculture innovation systems,
- limited role of producers and their organizations in planning and implementation of RAS and limited access,
- limited outreach and impact of RAS.

We appreciate the efforts made by the authors in bringing out nearly all the major bottlenecks crippling the RAS.

The authors have also explained some of the concepts such as Agricultural Innovation Systems (see box 4, page 18 in the book). Other challenges such as lack of sufficient experience, expertise and empathy among RAS providers to work with minority ethnic groups leading to exclusion and limited impact on poverty reduction among these groups are also discussed. ICT have much larger scope and impact but the authors have pointed out the disadvantages associated with completely relying on ICT's in the context of the family farming.



The chapter on *Addressing Gaps in RAS to Support Family Farms* has been rationally designed. The authors tried to extensively deal with the issues under different subheads. We were surprised to read about Community alliance with family farm (CAFF) which is a 35-year old non-profit organization that advocates for California's family farms and sustainable agriculture. We have recently started taking serious note on family farming while this organization has been working on it since last 35 years. CAFF works directly with the regional members and family farmers to increase the use of fresh, healthy and local food and help the grower prosper. We would like to appreciate the authors in bringing out such a remarkable example for the readers. The study of this organization in depth helps the extension practitioners to devise a strategy for the family farmers in their countries. Separate strategies have been devised for different groups like youth, women etc which is a need of the hour as agriculture is going through the phase of feminization and youth migration.

This chapter is laced with the case studies from different countries like the common agricultural policy (CAP) and family farming in Europe, policy support for family farming in Brazil, recognizing the dynamics of indigenous knowledge in Africa, Asia and Latin American countries. The chapter provide comprehensive strategies right from enhancing the

capacities of the extension services providers to building on the indigenous knowledge, organizing family farmers as producer organization, use of ICT for family farmer's etc. Extension professional will be immensely benefited by the strategies devised in this book. Some diagrammatic representation should have been included in these chapters for better understanding of the readers.

The policy paper helps extension professionals by providing a quick and comprehensive reference to the family farming. It is well written with all the relevant examples from different countries.

This publication is freely downloadable from <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5704e.pdf>

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