



Significance of Extension in Dairy sector

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Around 85% of the livestock population shared by the rural mass belongs to the economically weaker sections of the society.

The farming community of Animal Husbandry sector that includes the small farmers, marginal farmers and agricultural labours may be assisted to increase their family income. To support this group primarily the employment opportunities in the sector has to be exploited. A well organised and effectively working extension service is absolutely essential to achieve this goal.

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The perceptions and priorities of the farmers as affected by socio-economic status, geography, gender and land availability have to be studied through appropriate extension approach. They can monitor the status of livestock in the rural areas, educate farmers on recent trends in management practices, scientific feeding and breeding. Moreover they can use participatory approach to learn about local constraints, prevailing practices, infrastructure facilities, women contribution and current problems in the field.

One of the major constraints that the dairy industry is facing today is the increased cost of production. Compared to other states

Kerala has less land availability. Due to continuous fragmentation, change in cropping pattern, decline of paddy cultivation, high population density and conversion of land for construction purposes, area under cultivation has become limited.

Some of us may question the relevance of extension service and awareness programmes in a total literacy state. But a Veterinarian who offers door to door service especially in northern districts might have experienced the insufficient and inadequate education among dairy farmers. For example farmers know that mastitis cause great economic losses but they are not aware that it can be controlled to a certain extent by measures like scientific milking, housing, better cow shed hygiene, teat dipping and dry cow therapy.

Extension service can play a key role in popularizing the Veterinary health care system. Mass awareness programmes should be implemented for popularising fodder cultivation. The National Agricultural Commission recommends that, of the total area cultivated, 10% should be devoted for fodder cultivation, but in Kerala it is only 1%, where the value of agricultural output from animal husbandry sector is more than 30%.

Separate block level extension wing is needed to look after the extension activities and implementation of schemes in that area including decentralized planning programme. This can be co-ordinated at the district level and controlled at the state level.

Though we have a key role in planning and implementation, Veterinarians in the field find it very difficult to play both the roles as a clinician and project-implementing officer. So to prepare and implement viable projects, trained wing of officers at the block level are needed.

Major thrust areas like animal health care and production improvement programmes can be channelised through extension service. Unless awareness programmes for sustainable farming practices are not implemented well in advance, poor livestock farmers who are now struggling for existence may be compelled to leave this sector.

