

MANAGE Agricultural Extension "Evening4Learning (E4L)" Webinar Series

Topic: "Advancing Agricultural Extension through Broadcasting: Insights from Farm TV"

Schedule:
29-11-2022, 19:00-19:45 PM

MANAGE - Center for Agricultural Extension Innovations, Reforms and Agripreneurship (MANAGE- CAEIRA)
National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad- 500 030, INDIA



About the Program

The MANAGE Agricultural Extension "Evening4Learning" Webinar Series is aimed at enhancing knowledge and professional engagement in the field of agricultural extension. The twelve-day series is structured with each day focusing on a distinct topic under a common theme, allowing participants to gain comprehensive insights into key areas of extension. The program is intended for a diverse audience, including postgraduate and doctoral students, agricultural faculty, and industry professionals. It covers broad themes ranging from entrepreneurship and sustainability to emerging technologies in agriculture.





Speaker

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DR. Venkatramana Hegde

About the Speaker

Dr. Venkatraman Hegde is the Chief Managing Director of Shramajeevi Television Private Limited, Bengaluru, with over two decades of experience in the visual media and production industry. He has held various leadership positions within the organisation and previously served as a Producer and Director at Shramajeevi Television for more than 16 years. His expertise encompasses television production, film direction, media management, and strategic communication, with a strong focus on leveraging visual media for effective knowledge dissemination and social impact.

Introduction

Agricultural extension and rural advisory services play a crucial role in disseminating agricultural technologies, strengthening farmers' capacities, and facilitating informed decision-making. However, conventional extension systems often face challenges in providing timely, crop-specific, and location-specific technical advice to farmers, particularly when specialised expertise is not readily available at the local level.

Digital media and internet-based communication platforms offer new opportunities to address these gaps by connecting farmers with agricultural scientists, experienced practitioners, research institutions, and other stakeholders. In this context, Farm TV, an internet-based agricultural television platform, demonstrates an innovative approach to agricultural communication and advisory services by combining digital content delivery with expert consultations and institutional networking.

Development and Operational Model of Farm TV

The idea of establishing a dedicated agricultural television channel emerged from the need to provide farmers with continuous access to relevant agricultural information. However, the high investment required to establish and operate a satellite television channel posed a major constraint.

With the growing popularity of over-the-top (OTT) platforms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, internet-based content distribution was explored as a more accessible and cost-effective alternative. This approach enabled agricultural programmes to reach farmers without the substantial infrastructure and distribution costs associated with conventional satellite broadcasting.

Farm TV was launched in 2021, with its official telecast commencing on 1 June 2021. The initiative was incubated at MANAGE, Hyderabad, and received support under the RKVY-RAFTAAR programme. The platform operates through a dedicated mobile application, enabling farmers to access agricultural programmes and advisory services using digital devices. The application had recorded approximately 65,000 downloads. In addition, programmes were disseminated through three YouTube channels and four Facebook pages, expanding the platform's reach across multiple digital channels.

The operational model combines recorded programmes, live interactive sessions, and direct consultations with farmers. Two recorded programmes and one live programme were produced daily, providing regular opportunities for agricultural information dissemination and interaction with farmers.

Digital Agricultural Advisory Services

A major component of Farm TV is its free, live agricultural consultancy service, through which farmers can seek advice on crop production, pest and disease management, soil health, and other agricultural problems.

Farmers experiencing pest and disease problems can share photographs for preliminary assessment, while soil-related queries can be supported by soil test reports submitted through WhatsApp. General queries are addressed directly, while specialised questions are referred to relevant scientists, subject experts, or experienced farmers. When an immediate answer is unavailable, the query is forwarded to the appropriate expert, and the response is subsequently communicated to the farmer. This mechanism helps ensure that farmers receive technically informed advice rather than speculative or incomplete recommendations.

Agricultural knowledge is distributed across universities, research institutes, government departments, private organisations, and experienced farmers. No individual extension professional or institution can possess expertise across all crops, varieties, production practices, and emerging agricultural problems. Farm TV therefore seeks to bridge this gap by connecting farmers with appropriate sources of expertise.

The initiative has established linkages with six agricultural universities in Karnataka, the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), and several other public and private organisations. These institutional partnerships facilitate access to specialised knowledge and help strengthen the credibility of the advisory services.

Bridging Gaps in the Conventional Extension System

The limited availability of specialised technical expertise at the local level is a major challenge for conventional agricultural extension. Farmers frequently approach extension personnel with diverse queries, but the personnel concerned may not always possess the specific knowledge required to address every problem immediately. In some cases, identifying and contacting the appropriate expert can also be difficult.

Farm TV seeks to address this challenge by functioning as an intermediary between farmers and the wider agricultural knowledge system. Rather than relying exclusively on the expertise available within a single institution or at a particular administrative level, the platform draws on a network of scientists, researchers, experienced farmers, and industry specialists.

The effectiveness of agricultural extension depends not only on technology generation but also on the ability to connect farmers with relevant expertise when needed. Farm TV's approach illustrates how digital communication can complement existing extension institutions by facilitating knowledge exchange, expert referrals, and timely advisory support.

Promoting Crop Diversification and Locally Adapted Innovations

An important aspect of Farm TV's work is its focus on exploring opportunities for cultivating high-value crops in non-traditional areas. These include cocoa, pepper, coffee, cashew, and cardamom.

Farmers sometimes successfully cultivate crops beyond their conventional production zones, creating opportunities for diversification and additional income. However, such practices may not receive formal recommendations when adequate local research evidence is unavailable.

Farm TV documents these field-level experiences, connects farmers with relevant experts and institutions, and explores the potential for adapting successful practices to other locations. This approach can be described as reverse engineering, whereby successful farmer-led practices are identified, examined, and subjected to further technical assessment before their wider dissemination. The platform engages with specialised institutions and industry experts to obtain technical inputs and assess the suitability of these crops under different agro-climatic conditions.

The approach seeks to combine farmers' practical experiences with scientific knowledge. Success in one location should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of suitability across all regions. Promising practices therefore need to be assessed by relevant scientists and institutions before recommendations are extended to other locations.

Feedback mechanisms among farmers, extension professionals, researchers, and other stakeholders should also be strengthened so that emerging field-level innovations can inform research priorities and advisory services.

Supporting Farmers at Different Stages of Agricultural Enterprise Development

Farm TV also provides information and guidance to individuals entering agriculture, including young graduates, engineers, and other professionals interested in establishing agricultural enterprises. Such individuals require support at multiple stages, beginning with the selection and purchase of agricultural land. The guidance may cover soil and water testing, farm planning, crop selection, fencing, identification of reliable planting material suppliers, and selection of appropriate production practices.

The platform emphasises the importance of assessing the technical and economic feasibility of proposed crops before making investments, as farmers may be attracted to high-value crops without adequate evidence of their suitability or commercial viability. Farm TV therefore seeks to discourage premature investment in crops whose performance and market prospects have not been sufficiently established.

The initiative also connects farmers with reliable sources of planting material, including government institutions and established private organisations. These linkages aim to improve access to authentic planting material and reduce the risk of farmers being misled by unreliable suppliers.

This approach extends agricultural advisory services beyond the dissemination of production technologies to encompass farm establishment, enterprise planning, input sourcing, and decision-making throughout the agricultural production cycle.

Digital Outreach, Farmer Engagement, and Trust Building

Farmers' engagement with digital agricultural content varies considerably. While some actively seek information through educational programmes, many approach the platform primarily when they encounter specific production problems or require immediate technical assistance.

Farm TV has therefore combined regular agricultural programming with problem-solving services to encourage sustained engagement. The platform uses a unique identification code for registered users to facilitate access to its advisory services.

This experience suggests that digital extension platforms need to move beyond one-way information dissemination and deliver practical value through interaction, consultation, and problem resolution. Farmers are more likely to engage with a platform when they perceive it as useful, accessible, and responsive to their immediate needs.

Credibility is a key factor in the platform's development. Farm TV seeks to maintain constructive relationships with scientists, government officials, and agricultural institutions. It positions itself as a facilitator of agricultural knowledge exchange and aims to promote informed discussion and collaboration among stakeholders.

The platform also provides opportunities for agricultural department officials, institutional leaders, and other stakeholders to interact with farmers through live programmes. Such interactions can strengthen communication between agricultural administration and farming communities.

Business Model and Sustainability

Farm TV follows a free-to-view model, under which the application and programmes are made available to viewers without subscription charges. The platform's primary source of revenue is advertising, similar to the business model adopted by free-to-air television channels.

Farm TV reportedly achieved its break-even point within approximately six months of commencing its official telecast. This experience indicates that a digital agricultural communication platform can potentially combine public-oriented information services with commercial sustainability.

The experience highlights the importance of selecting a delivery model that balances affordability for farmers with the operational requirements of content production, technology maintenance, and advisory service delivery.

A separate venture, Farm Doctor Agri Services and Consultancy, was initiated to develop a more systematic agricultural consultancy service. The model involves engaging young agricultural graduates and connecting them with a panel of scientists and subject experts to provide structured advisory services.

While Farm TV's core programming and existing advisory activities were described as free, the consultancy venture aims to explore a more formal service-delivery model. This initiative seeks to address the gap between the technical knowledge available within research and extension institutions and the specialised advice accessible to farmers.

The expansion also highlights the potential of digital agricultural communication platforms to generate employment opportunities for agricultural graduates while strengthening professional agricultural advisory services.

Key Highlights

- **Digital Agricultural Communication:** Farm TV leverages OTT platforms, a dedicated mobile application, YouTube, and Facebook to disseminate agricultural information and reach farmers through multiple digital channels.
- **Expert-Based Advisory Services:** The platform facilitates free, live agricultural consultancy by connecting farmers with scientists, subject experts, experienced farmers, and research institutions to address crop-specific and location-specific problems.
- **Promotion of Farmer-Led Innovations:** Farm TV documents successful cultivation practices in non-traditional areas and connects farmers with experts for technical assessment, validation, and potential wider dissemination.
- **End-to-End Agricultural Enterprise Support:** The platform guides aspiring agripreneurs in farm establishment, crop selection, soil and water testing, sourcing reliable planting material, and assessing the technical and economic feasibility of agricultural enterprises.
- **Sustainable Digital Extension Model:** Farm TV combines free agricultural information and advisory services with an advertising-based revenue model, while its associated consultancy initiative explores structured advisory services and employment opportunities for agricultural graduates.

Interactive Session

1. Does Farm TV promote a particular farming system, and how does it ensure the reliability of agricultural information disseminated through its platform?

Farm TV maintains a neutral approach towards different farming systems, including natural farming, organic farming, biodynamic agriculture and conventional farming. Recognising that no single farming system is suitable for all situations, it promotes context-specific and integrated approaches, including Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) and Integrated Pest Management (IPM), to reduce excessive chemical use while recommending appropriate interventions when necessary.

The platform distinguishes itself from other digital media by emphasising scientific accuracy, professional audio-visual production and responsible communication. Agricultural information is cross-checked to minimise the risk of disseminating misleading recommendations that could result in financial losses for farmers. By prioritising credibility, practical relevance and scientific validation, Farm TV aims to provide dependable agricultural information.

2. How does Farm TV reach traditional farmers who may have limited digital literacy or be reluctant to adopt new agricultural technologies?

A survey conducted in Karnataka indicated that approximately 96% of the sampled farm families had access to a smartphone, either through the farmer or a family member. Farm TV uses its free application and YouTube channel to disseminate agricultural programmes, providing alternative access when streaming difficulties occur.

The platform primarily focuses on innovators and early adopters, who are more willing to experiment with new technologies and influence other farmers through their experiences. These groups constitute approximately 30% of farmers. Rather than attempting to persuade every farmer individually, Farm TV focuses on these early adopters, expecting late adopters and more reluctant farmers to follow successful examples over time. Its growth has also been driven by word-of-mouth publicity, regular farmer interactions and the credibility established through its live programmes.

3. What innovative approaches does Farm TV adopt compared with conventional agricultural extension systems, and how can its model be replicated in other regions?

Smartphones and digital platforms, combining professionally produced video programmes with practical, farmer-oriented content. Its approach offers an alternative to conventional broadcasting formats and enables farmers to access agricultural information through multiple digital channels.

The platform has reportedly attracted approximately 65,000 downloads or users through organic outreach, without spending on paid advertisements. Its growth has been supported by farmer participation, online testimonials, news coverage and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Farm TV is willing to provide technical guidance, support the adaptation of its technological platform and train interested teams. However, successful replication requires more than technology; it also depends on developing scientifically validated, locally relevant content in appropriate languages and building the capacity of local teams. The model also offers potential for disseminating timely agricultural advisories and early warnings, provided these services are appropriately developed for local conditions.

YouTube Link:
https://youtu.be/ofZARufoyNE?t=85

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