



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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EXTENSION EDUCATION APPROACHES OF HORTICULTURAL EXTENSION MARKETING: A VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Most of the strategies utilized in agricultural extension are adopted from extension education. Their use, however, depends on the organizational structure of the extension system, availability of resources, program objectives, and leadership style in the extension organization. Their use varies from place to place and from technology to technology. No single extension education approach can be considered as the best. Whether this can influence people to utilize any technology or information depends on the persons using them, the nature of such technology and the context in which they will be applied. What is applicable in one area may not work at all in another. Hence, the choice of extension education approach needs to consider the context and conditions in the area. Therefore this paper examines only the more commonly-used extension education approaches will be discussed in relation to horticultural extension marketing. These are: commodity approach, farming systems approach, project approach and participatory approach.

KEYWORDS

Extension education, Marketing, Agriculture extension.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension strategies can be used to effectively complement the traditional marketing approach. Companies can hire their own extension staff or partner with existing extension personnel from the government or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Extension agents can serve as after-sales service for seed companies by assisting farmers on how to best use the product they have just acquired. Most of the strategies utilized in agricultural extension are adopted from extension education. Their use, however, depends on the organizational structure of the extension system, availability of resources, program objectives, and leadership style in the extension organization. Their use varies from place to place and from technology to technology. No single extension education approach can be considered as the best. Whether this can influence people to utilize any technology or information depends on the persons using them, the nature of such technology and the context in which they will be applied. What is applicable in one area may not work at all in another. Hence, the choice of extension education approach needs to consider the context and conditions in the area. Therefore this paper examines only the more commonly-used extension education approaches will be discussed in relation to horticultural extension marketing. These are: commodity approach, farming systems approach, project approach and participatory approach.

EXTENSION EDUCATION APPROACHES

THE COMMODITY OR SCHEME APPROACH

This extension approach is highly specialized since it focuses on an export crop such as coffee, sugar, tobacco, cotton etc. It assumes that the only way to increase production is to concentrate on a particular crop. Examples of this are the boards of different crops in many countries. The purpose of the commodity approach is to increase production of a particular crop and improve its quality. It also aims to maximize the utilization of specific inputs. This approach is controlled by the organization implementing a particular extension program. Such control covers the setting of program goals, extension messages, time frame for activities, people participating in the program and extension staff. Implementation is based on the instructions of the organization. Techniques used in this approach are face-to-face interactions, group meetings, print media and demonstration farms where appropriate. If farmers do not follow the instructions, then sanctions are applied by the organization (low prices or non-provision of inputs). The extension organization provides resources, trains technicians and provides support services such as on-location farm management accounting or on-the spot soil tests when necessary. Success is measured based on total production of the particular crop. Advantages of this approach are:

- The technology is appropriate to the production process, and there is coordination of research and marketing.
- There is a concentrated range of technical concern.
- There are better incentives for trained personnel, and closer management and supervision.
- There are fewer farmers for each extension worker to handle, thus, it is easier to monitor and evaluate.
- It is cost-effective.

The disadvantages of this approach are:

- Less priority is given to farmers' interests.
- It does not offer advice to farmers raising other crops not covered by the program.

THE FARMING SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

This approach assumes that technology which fits the needs of small farmers is not available; hence this has to be generated locally. Its purpose is to provide extension personnel (and farmers in the end) with research results appropriate to the needs and interests of local farm conditions. The farming systems approach is holistic. Thus, control of the program is shared jointly by men and women in the locality, extension workers and researchers. In each locality, the program "fits" the needs and interests of its end-users. Over time, they are likely to participate, adopt the recommended practices and support the continuity of extension education. There is a partnership of research and extension personnel and with local farmers. This approach involves analysis and field trials in the fields and homes. This is coupled with such techniques as meetings, tours and demonstrations. It also requires research personnel to go out to the project sites to listen to men and women with the extension personnel, to try to understand the farm as a system. This approach:

- Encourages active participation of the target group.
- Utilizes the existing organization.
- Is conservation-based.
- Views the family/household as an integral part of the farming system.
- Is dependent on the availability of support services.
- Is enhanced when farming system research activities exist.
- Has effective mechanisms for extending identified technologies and emphasizes the need for networking.
- Provides for substantial and continuous training.
- It aims for sustainability.

Success using this approach is measured in terms of adoption of technologies developed and their continuous use over time. Advantages of the approach are:

- Relevance and "fit" of the messages generated.

- Availability of messages to be shared with end-users.
- Linkages between extension and extension systems.
- Commitment of farmers to use the technologies.

The disadvantages, however, are:

- Cost is very high to bring the team to the field.
- This approach may be too slow.
- Heavy specialization.
- Reporting and administrative control are difficult.

THE PROJECT APPROACH

The extension officer's role is then to support the individual, to coordinate the activities of the different parties involved and to chase up the progress of the project. A planned project approach to horticultural marketing development will increase the chances of genuine improvements being made. It is important for the extension officer to have a clear mental image of the desired outcome and successfully communicate that objective. The project must be understood by all parties if they are going to be able to work effectively together. Business management experience has shown that targets, such as tonnages to be shipped or selling prices, are important too, as they provide challenges to the parties involved and can be used to monitor the progress of the project. This technique is called "management by objectives."

However, no matter how good the preliminary work has been, when a plan is put into action the unexpected will happen. Allowances for the unexpected should be made. It is advisable to start the project with a pilot stage so that mistakes can be made on a small scale and learned from. Furthermore, the project must be flexible so that changes can be made in the light of these lessons. Inevitably, the project's critics will try to emphasize any problems; most successful projects will have had to face problems, particularly in the early phases, and their success is often a measure of their ability to learn from and overcome difficulties. The project approach is generally supported by foreign funds or by organizations collaborating with government. Implementation, however, is done by project staff and other personnel employed on a temporary basis. The measures of success in this approach are usually the short-range changes that have taken place at the project site based on the objectives of the project. Advantages of this approach are:

- It is focused and hence, evaluation of effectiveness can easily be undertaken.
- Novel techniques and methods can be tested and experimented.
- Lessons learned from such can have lasting values in extension education.

There are disadvantages however, which are:

- Time frame is too short.
- Funds provided may be more than is appropriate.
- A flow of "good ideas," or the "spread effect," to other areas is limited.
- Unwarranted continuity after the project is over.
- Double standard for personnel (within and outside the project) is evident. This becomes a problem after the life of the project.

THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

It is a community-based development approach which focuses on the involvement of the very people who are the actors and targets of development. The assumption is that people's creative attributes and potentials can be tapped for development endeavours. Considering that people have their own resources, they should be involved in all phases of the program management. It is important that awareness is created and that they are empowered to take control of their own lives and fulfill their own needs and aspirations. In so doing, they will enhance and use their potential to improve not only themselves, but their community as well. Hence, they can be self-reliant and, thus, enhance their human dignity (self-worth). An example of the participatory approach is participatory breeding. Participatory breeding is widely used during the development phase on new varieties. Participatory breeding ensures that the seed that is developed meets not only the technical requirements and objectives set forth by the breeder, but also results in a product that is accepted by the end user. The purpose of a participatory extension approach is to increase production and income and enhance human dignity and quality of life of the beneficiaries. Such an approach involves:

Social preparation: This consists of selection of beneficiaries, their orientation and awareness creation to prepare them for the planning and implementation of the program/project.

Training of those involved in the program: To enhance the capability of the participants in participatory extension education, a training program is necessary for them to understand the methodology, values and technical know-how in the implementation of such an approach.

Diagnosis of the study site: This is undertaken by the participant-beneficiaries to determine the socio-economic, cultural, political and ecological aspects of the community. Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) is used to get the baseline data which will be the basis for determining the changes later on that have taken place in the community. The PRA will help determine the problems, needs, potentials and capabilities of the local people in the area which will be the starting point for development.

Planning process: With the active participation of end-users and implementers (agencies, Governmental Organizations (GO) and NGOs) involved in the program, the group evolves a development plan for the targeted area. This plan includes the why, what, when, where and for whom, with whom and how the plan will be carried out. It will take into consideration the interventions that will be introduced, the inputs, process, output and outcome of the program/project.

Implementation of the plan: All sectors in the community will be harnessed and mobilized for the execution of the plan. Linkages within and outside the community will be established classifying the roles/functions played by the different agencies/organizations and coordinating such activities with local leaders participating actively. This phase will consider the timeliness of inputs, synchronization of the processes/activities and the monitoring of the outputs and outcomes and aligning the same to the program/project objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation: At each phase of the approach, monitoring will have to be undertaken to evaluate the processes that are taking place to find out whether the project is on the right track and whether redirections are necessary. This phase will also determine the pace of the implementation for a formative evaluation of the approach. Moreover, the process as well as the impact of the approach should also be assessed.

The purpose of this approach is to find out whether the needs and problems of the people are taken into consideration, and which goals are achieved. In the end, there is also the sustainability of the program and the self-reliance of people themselves. The advantages of this approach are:

- Relevance or "fit" of the program.
- Mutually supportive relationships are developed among participants (researchers, extension specialists and local people) including those who provide support services.
- It stimulates increased confidence, awareness, and participation among end users.

On the other hand, the disadvantages are:

- Lack of control of the program from the government's point of view.
- There is difficulty in reporting and accounting of the participatory approach.
- Pressure is applied to research and extension systems by the local people.
- Local people may exert pressure on personnel management decisions (choice, assignments and upward mobility of extension workers) on the central government.

MARKETING TECHNIQUES FOR EXTENSION AGENTS

Credibility can be a serious problem for extension officers. Farmers will often be skeptical of advice from someone they consider being inexperienced in practical matters. Growers may be suspicious of the motives for providing free advice. They are understandably reluctant to accept untried advice, particularly when they will suffer financially if it proves to be wrong. Furthermore, it is often those who most need good advice who are the most difficult to contact. These are the small, poor farmers without transport who are usually the most conservative. Wealthy farmers will probably have the transport to visit extension officers and are often more appreciative of extension advice. They are, however, those that least need assistance.

The challenge to the extension officer with special responsibility for marketing is firstly to decide how the marketing problems of the area can be solved. Secondly, he or she needs to think through the best way to get advice or plans across to the maximum number of target farmers. Finally, the agreement and the commitment of those that will be involved in any coordinated production program in the area must be obtained. The two chief functions of an extension officer are:

- to reduce the learning time for an individual farmer to accept a new idea or technique;
- to increase the number of farmers who understand the new ideas. .

In some countries certain extension officers are given the responsibility of becoming subject matter specialists in marketing. It is then their task to train other extension officers and provide specialist marketing advice. By working through other extension officers their effectiveness is increased. Generally the marketing extension officer is based in the production area. He or she must make regular visits to the markets in order to maintain contacts and keep in touch with changes in price and demand. Sometimes, however, he is based away from the production areas. In this case he will have to return regularly to the production areas to maintain contact with growers regarding their problems and to provide relevant marketing advice. Experience has shown that one of the most effective ways of working is to work with groups of farmers. An extension technique, very much under-exploited, is helping farmers indirectly by providing guidance and advice to private-sector companies. For example, companies who either supply inputs or, more importantly, assist in the marketing and distribution of produce can often use timely and reasoned advice to put into motion a process which brings benefits to large numbers of growers.

FARMER TEACHES FARMERS

A successful farmer explains to a group of other farmers his production and marketing practices. The meeting is most effective on the farmer's own farm. This concept is similar to the concept of **Farmers Field School**, where trained farmers will in turn train their peers for an optimal diffusion of knowledge and new or improved technology.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Practical demonstrations of techniques such as harvesting, cleaning, grading and packing, preferably taking place on a farm are useful. Prepared samples, which demonstrate the differences overtime of different handling practices, can be effective, as are samples of competing produce and photographs.

TALKS AND SEMINARS

Possible topics include: market possibilities successful case studies, post harvest techniques, market-oriented production techniques. Buyers and middlemen should be involved to talk.

PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES

The farmer group is encouraged to identify its own major problems. The problem solving can be tackled systematically, by calling in specialists individually to advise the group or by forming a panel to answer farmers' questions. Alternatively, the group might be encouraged to decide on their own solutions, which they can then implement themselves collectively.

STUDY TOURS

Farmers are taken on a study tour to make their own contacts and to see the market for themselves, visit processing centers and observe how their produce withstands transportation. Farmers visit farmers in another area to exchange experiences and see new techniques. This experience alone can transform a grower's views on production and marketing.

WRITTEN INFORMATION / PROTOCOLS

Fact sheets are prepared and distributed. These can identify potential trading partners or provide technical information on production and post-harvest techniques.

MARKET NEWS SERVICES

Establish a market news service which provides regular, reliable, relevant and timely information. This may be in the form of a news sheet or a radio bulletin.

IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The ways in which problems can be solved and opportunities exploited will change from area to area. To help the extension officer have a clear overview of the area, he or she will need to identify what stage in horticultural development the region has reached. Normally the aim will be to try to introduce the next steps in the horticultural progress.

ANALYSIS OF CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN MARKETING EXTENSION

Constraints	Opportunities
Problems	Advantages
No local market	Capable of early crop production
Poor transport services	
Solutions	Actions
Organize local farmers' market Encourage buyers with own transport	Encourage growing early crops and develop production techniques for earlier crops

AGREEING ON AN ACTION PLAN

Giving advice to individuals: The first involves giving advice to an individual farmer. This should be a low priority as it is an inefficient use of time, where advice is given to individuals, larger-scale farmers obtain the most benefits.

Providing marketing advice to groups: The second involves providing marketing advice to farmer groups, particularly through the methods of mass extension. This has the advantage of reaching a large number of growers and allows coordination of farmers' activities and cooperation in marketing.

Providing information: The third technique involves providing advice or information to critical individuals, organizations or private-sector companies in the marketing chain whose actions can have a beneficial effect on marketing.

Finally, and perhaps most ambitiously, an extension officer may decide whether it is necessary to attempt a project approach to develop horticultural marketing. Marketing is normally achieved by a series of interlinking stages and coordination between the stages is essential. A project approach is one which involves coordinating the activities of a number of different intermediaries in a marketing chain. It may involve a group of farmers assembling their produce at one point so that it can be transported in bulk to the market. More complex schemes could involve ensuring a supply of inputs, providing growers with production advice and negotiating contract terms with a buyer, be he/she a food processor or exporter.

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