

PRIVATE EXTENSION SYSTEM - AN ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Under the liberalized economy, farmers have to modify and change their attitude and practices to cope with the new environment created by The World Trade Organization. They have to adopt the strategy of diversification and combination of different agricultural enterprises to compete in the world market. Moreover, when agriculture grows and becomes highly commercialized, farmers would require specialized information. There is a need for quick, accurate, timely and specific information for the success of specialized farming. Specialized and quality production needs heavy investment, thus, enhancing the risk. Therefore, farmers' requirement for agricultural information changes qualitatively. Presently almost all the extension services are provided by public sector except for a few attempts by private companies and NGO's. It has been seen that public sector extension services are not fully equipped to meet the new challenges. This is due to the non-availability of specialists with various state departments.

Knowing fully well the value of information, farmers have started looking out for other sources of information that could provide them desired information and technical guidance. Thus, privatizing extension to improve the services to the farmers is under active consideration. The private sector seems to have a role in augmenting production and raising the income level of farmers as a supplementary extension system for certain groups of producers under certain conditions. Considering the upcoming need for supplementary extension services provided under private sector it was felt necessary to understand the views of the farmers. Hence the present study was undertaken with the objective of assessing the farmer's response to private paid extension services.

Methodology

An organization of progressive farmers in the name of Punjab Kisan Club, working very successfully under the patronage of the Punjab Agriculture University formed the universe for the study. The present study is based on the responses received from 158

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members out of 195 members, who are ready to pay. The responses were collected through personal interview with each respondent with the help of specially prepared interview schedule. Simple statistical tools were used to analyze the data. Responses were obtained to know the opinion of the farmers regarding paid/private extension services.

Results

It was found that out of the total 195 respondents 158 respondents were ready to pay for the extension services. They were further asked to indicate the subjects areas for which they are ready to pay the fee. The response obtained has been presented in table 1.

Table 1. Fields of expert advice for which the respondents are willing to pay

			N=158
S. No.	Subject	Rank	Frequency
1.	Value addition and processing	1	151 (95.6)
2.	Dairy farming	2	149 (94.3)
3.	Quality production	3	148 (93.7)
4.	Fruit growing	4	145 (91.8)
5.	Seed production	5	143(90.5)
6.	Poultry farming	6	142(89.9)
7.	Vegetable growing	7	133 (88.9)
8.	Flower cultivation	8	133 (84.2)
9.	Management skills	9	129 (81.7)
10.	Specialized training	10	102 (63.0)

Figures in the above table indicate that the most important area for which advice on payment was sought was value addition and processing. Farmers were keen to add value to their production through quality control and processing. Data further suggested that farmers were ready to pay for specialized farming activities such as Dairy, Poultry, Fish, Vegetables, fruits, and seed production. They were found to be eager to improve their managerial skills to increase profit. They were even ready to pay for specialized training courses.

Reasons for paid services

Respondents were further asked to list the reasons for readiness to pay for the required technical advice. Their response given in table 2.

Table 2. Reasons for paid services as given by respondents

N=158

S. No.	Subject	Rank	Frequency
1.	To obtain need based information	VI	134 (84.48%)
2.	More Accountability	I	149 (94.30%)
3.	To obtain timely and quality services	III	141 (89.24%)
4.	To obtain higher returns	V	137 (86.70%)
5.	As per market demand	VI	132 (83.54%)
6.	To obtain market intelligence	IV	138 (87.34%)
7.	To adopt innovations	VIII	127 (80.30%)
8.	Continuity and regularity of the services	II	146 (92.40%)

The most important reason indicated in favour of paid extension service was accountability. The farmers were of the opinion that advice obtained on payment would be valid, continuous and regular and maintain its reputation. Moreover, farmers would be able to obtain need based and as per market demand information resulting in better returns.

Drawbacks of paid services

Farmers were further asked to highlight drawbacks of paid/private extension services.

Table 3. Drawbacks of private services as indicated by the respondents

N=158

S. No.	Item	Rank	Frequency
1.	Less contact (between farmer and extension expert)	III	32 (20.25)
2.	Regional imbalance	V	26 (16.46%)
3.	Blockage of technology transfer to small and marginal farmer	II	41 (25.94%)
4.	More exploitation of farmers	IV	31 (19.62%)
5.	Discussion bound to paid topic only	I	99 (62.68%)

Majority of the farmers were not able to express their views except that paid services will confine only to the specific topic or problem thus, blocking the free flow of information. Some of the other fears expressed by them are: blockage of information for small and marginal farmers; limited contact with extension agencies; exploitation of the farmers by private agencies; and regional imbalance.

Conclusion

It is obvious that private extension services cannot replace state extension services. A dynamic strategy is needed for combination of private and public extension services. In future both have to work together for the development of agriculture in healthy competition by helping and complementing each other. In India, the present structure of extension services has to continue with parallel private extension services so that those who can afford this cost sharing guidance can consult the agencies and have better guidance for harvesting more profits.