

Information Needs of Rythu Mitra Group Members of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

This study was conducted on the information needs of Rythu Mitra Group members in Warangal and Guntur districts of Andhra Pradesh. Results reveal that information needs of farmer respondents on personal and family health and education assume great importance. Among the agriculture and allied sectors, respondents needed information on soil conservation and forest management, water resources sector, agriculture and horticulture, animal husbandry, sericulture, fisheries, etc. Extension workers need to focus on the information needs of farmers, especially relating to agriculture and horticulture.

Introduction

The present age has been rightly called an Information age. According to Kemp “information has been described as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter”. Every one needs information in day to day life. Agricultural information plays a crucial role in agricultural development as well as in improving the livelihoods of farmers. The farming community requires various types of information for day-to-day agricultural activities. Rural farmers are not getting the right information at the right time leading to slow development of rural farmers’ community in sustainable agricultural development activities (Meitei and Devi 2009).

In order to respond to the micro level realities of agriculture across the districts and to improve the economic condition of small, marginal and tenant farmers through Self- Help Groups, the Government of Andhra Pradesh (Department of Agriculture) took the lead of organizing farmers into 2,00,000 Rythu Mitra Groups (RMGs) in 2003. A Rythu Mitra Group consists of tenant, small and marginal (men and women) farmers for serving their common interests-relating to technology transfer, access to market information, self supporting finance mechanisms and micro credit requirements, thereby leading to their sustainable economic development.

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A holistic approach to agricultural extension today goes beyond technology transfer for major crops and livestock production systems. It also includes goals for human development, in terms of enhancing the management and technical skills of farm households relating to production and post harvest handling of high value crops, livestock and fisheries, sustainable natural resource management, family health and nutrition, leadership and organizational skills, in addition to social capital development, that is organizing producer groups (Swanson 2008). Several studies reveal that information needs of farmers regarding crop production and management are not fully met. Keeping this in view it was realized that there was a need to identify the information needs of Rythu Mitra Group (RMG) members in agricultural development related areas in Andhra Pradesh. Hence, this study was carried out to study the information needs of Rythu Mitra Group members in various sectors.

Methodology

One Rythu Mitra Group (RMG) from each of the 16 villages was selected through random sampling, from four mandals of two purposively selected districts of Andhra Pradesh. From each of the selected RMGs, 10 members were chosen by simple random sampling method making the total sample of 160 respondents. The information needs of the RMG members were measured with the help of a 3-point rating scale of a felt need (Always – 2, Sometimes – 1 and Never – 0) developed especially for this study. The frequencies of each response category were found out and respective frequencies were multiplied by the score allotted to it; then they were added and divided by the number of the respondents which gave the mean score for different information needs. The mean scores were used to rank them in order of need for information as perceived by RMG members.

Results and Discussion

Information needs of Rythu Mitra Group members were analyzed for eight sectors viz., health, soil conservation and forest management, agricultural marketing, water resources, education, agricultural credit and finance, agriculture and horticulture, animal husbandry, sericulture, fisheries and allied fields and presented under each sector. As may be seen in Table 1, the RMG members gave the first rank to the health sector (mean score being 1.130) as their information need. This may be due to the fact that personal and family health directly affects the wellbeing of any human being. Hence awareness and knowledge about the health sector was given prime importance, among others, by the farmer respondents. Information needs on soil conservation and forest management was ranked 2nd with a mean score of 1.026. In recent times, intensive cultivation and unhealthy agronomic practices have caused

serious depletion of the fertile top soil layer and hence the need for conservation was felt by farmers.

The next (3rd rank) is for agricultural marketing with a mean score of 1.024 followed by water resources sector (1.018, 4th rank) and education (0.986, 5th rank). The lowest information scores were for agricultural credit and finance (0.878, 6th rank), agriculture and horticulture (0.747, 7th rank) and animal husbandry, sericulture, fisheries, and allied fields (0.646, 8th rank). Since the respondents had been getting adequate information on these sectors, they were expected to be having sufficient knowledge as compared to other sectors and thus had less need for further information. These findings are in agreement with the research findings of Rao *et al.* (2004).

Table 1. Distribution of RMG Members according to their Information Needs in various Sectors

(N=160)

S.No.	Information needs	Mean	Rank
1	Health	1.130	I
2	Soil conservation and forest management	1.026	II
3	Agricultural marketing	1.024	III
4	Water resources sector	1.018	IV
5	Education	0.986	V
6	Agricultural credit and finance	0.878	VI
7	Agriculture and Horticulture	0.747	VII
8	Animal husbandry, Sericulture, Fisheries, and allied fields	0.646	VIII

Information needs under different sub areas of a sector were further analysed and are discussed here, according to their perceived degree of importance.

Information needs of RMG members in Agriculture and Horticulture

The data given in Table 2 indicates that in the agriculture and horticulture sector, a vast majority (more than 90 per cent) of the respondents needed information on crop varieties suitable for high yields, good for processing and value addition, resistant to pests/diseases and this sub information area was given first rank within the agriculture and horticulture sector, followed by seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, their dosages, availability and precautions to be taken while applying them. These two areas are primarily important for crop production hence respondents were interested to know more about these areas. The results of the study are in agreement with the study conducted by Ghimire *et al.*, 2012.

Developmental schemes implemented by the government departments in each block and village were given third rank by the respondents. This shows that most of the small and marginal farmers are unaware of developmental schemes relevant to them, hence the government needs to create awareness among farmers.

The least preferred information sub areas were cost of cultivation and economics of new horticultural crops/varieties (7th rank in the table), training programmes and skill up-gradation schemes (8th rank in the table), and technical details for setting up agro-processing units (9th rank). The results of the study are in agreement with the studies reported by Rezvanfar *et al.* (2006).

Table 2. Distribution of RMG Members according to their Information Needs in Agriculture and Horticulture

(N=160)

S.No.	Information needs	Always		Some times		Never		Mean	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Crop varieties suitable for high yields, good for processing and value addition, resistant to pests/diseases	71	44.40	78	48.80	11	6.90	1.38	I
2	Seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, their dosages, availability and precautions to be taken while applying them	36	22.50	103	64.40	21	13.10	1.09	II
3	Developmental schemes implemented by the government departments in each block/their villages	33	20.60	97	60.60	30	18.80	1.02	III
4	New types of farm tools, equipments that are cheap, rugged and easily available in the market	33	22.60	82	51.30	45	28.10	0.93	IV
5	List of technical persons, their contact addresses for seeking advice in specific problems faced by them in the field	10	6.30	80	50.00	70	43.80	0.63	V
6	Package of practices for major food grains and horticultural crops	22	13.80	52	32.50	86	53.80	0.60	VI
7	Cost of cultivation and economics of new horticultural crops/varieties	10	6.30	50	31.30	100	62.50	0.44	VII
8	Training programmes and skill up gradation schemes	10	6.30	43	26.90	107	66.90	0.39	VIII
9	Technical details for setting up agro-processing units	7	4.40	25	15.60	128	80.00	0.24	IX

Information Needs of RMG members on Water Resources

From Table 3 it is observed that more than half the respondents “always” needed information on arrival of sowing rains, and weekly rainfall probabilities (1st rank), methods of applying fertilizers along with irrigation (2nd rank) and water quality and its suitability for different crops (3rd rank). Forty per cent of the respondents “always” needed information on irrigation schedules for each crop (4th rank).

RMG members were least interested in getting information on types of pump sets and their suppliers (8th rank), and scientific methods of drainage systems on the farmland (9th rank).

The last (10th rank) interest of RMG members for information was on rain water harvesting methods and use for irrigation within the water resources sector. Though water harvesting methods are important for farmers because of water scarcity and declining ground water table due to excessive use of well irrigation, the respondents were not interested in it. It may be due to lack of awareness about the water crisis in years to come. The results of the study were in agreement with the studies reported by CRISP (2003) and Elizabeth (2007).

Table 3. Distribution of RMG members according to their Information Needs in Water Resources (N=160)

Sl. No.	Information Needs	Always		Sometimes		Never		Mean	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Arrival of sowing rains, and weekly rainfall probabilities	124	77.50	30	18.80	6	3.80	1.74	I
2	Methods of applying fertilizer along with irrigation	110	68.80	43	26.90	7	4.40	1.64	II
3	Water quality and its suitability for different crops	95	59.40	57	35.60	8	5.00	1.54	III
4	Irrigation schedules for each crop	64	40.00	86	53.80	10	6.30	1.34	IV
5	Action required under delayed rainfall, rainfed areas and drought and flood prone areas	30	18.80	78	48.80	52	32.50	0.86	V
6	Government schemes for supply of irrigation water	22	13.80	73	45.60	65	40.60	0.73	VI
7	Participatory irrigation management	23	14.40	66	41.30	71	44.40	0.70	VII
8	Information on types of pump sets and their suppliers	21	13.10	66	41.30	73	45.63	0.68	VIII
9	Scientific methods of drainage systems in the farmland	10	6.30	58	36.30	92	57.50	0.49	IX
10	Rain water harvesting methods and use for irrigation	14	8.80	46	28.80	100	62.50	0.46	X

Information Needs of RMG Members on Soil Conservation and Forest Management

It is observed from Table 4, that majority (64.40 per cent) of the respondents needed information "always" about the type of bio-fertilizers and organic manure, their preparation, availability and it was also ranked first among their information needs within the soil conservation and forest management sector, followed by 61.90 per cent of respondents who needed information "always" on soil properties (type, depth, fertility) (2nd rank) and methods and dosage of application of chemical fertilizers, dealers' locations /contact addresses (3rd rank).

Table 4. Distribution of RMG Members according to their Information Needs in Soil Conservation and Forest Management (N=160)

Sl. No.	Information Needs	Always		Some times		Never		Mean	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Type of bio-fertilizers and organic manure, their preparation, availability	103	64.40	48	30.00	9	5.60	1.59	I
2	Soil properties (type, depth, fertility)	99	61.90	55	34.40	6	3.80	1.58	II
3	Methods and dosage of application of chemical fertilizers, dealers' locations/contact addresses	37	23.10	98	61.30	25	15.60	1.08	III
4	Soil conservation measures	36	22.50	97	60.60	27	16.90	1.06	IV
5	Addresses of soil testing laboratories	30	18.80	81	50.60	49	30.60	0.88	V
6	Medicinal plants, package of cultivation practices, marketing facilities	23	14.40	49	30.60	88	55.00	0.59	VI
7	Community forest management	14	8.800	36	22.50	110	68.80	0.40	VII

Information Needs of RMG members on Animal Husbandry, Sericulture, Fisheries and allied fields

A cursory glance over the rank ordering of sub areas of information needs within the sector of animal husbandry, sericulture, fisheries and allied fields in Table 5, shows that 78.10 per cent and 63.10 per cent of the respondents "always" needed information about crossbred animals appropriate for ploughing, beef and milk and disease resistant (1st rank) and types of livestock diseases, prevention/treatment methods (2nd rank) respectively. Since, dairy is a subsidiary enterprise of farming the respondents wanted to know more on these aspects.

The RMG members gave 3rd rank to the packages of self-employment opportunities in the rural areas. The possible reason might be that RMG members were small and marginal farmers, so the income earned from farming may not be sufficient to meet their family needs.

The least required information sub areas were government incentives for agri-business (7th rank), techniques and incentives available for food-processing units (8th rank), meat / pork / beef preservation and processing techniques (9th rank) and all aspects related to fish farm, fish-seed availability, rearing, health care, market for ornamental fish, etc. (10th rank). The results of the study were in agreement with the study reported by Elizabeth (2007).

Table 5. Distribution of RMG members according to their Information Needs in Animal husbandry, Sericulture, Fisheries and allied fields

(N=160)

Sl. No.	Information Needs	Always	Some times	Never	Mean	Rank
		F	F	F		
1	Crossbreed animals appropriate for ploughing, beef and milk and disease resistant	125 (78.10)	24 (15.00)	11 (6.90)	1.71	I
2	Types of livestock diseases/prevention /treatment methods	101 (63.10)	52 (32.50)	7 (4.40)	1.59	II
3	Package of self-employment opportunities in the rural areas	23 (14.40)	77 (48.10)	60 (37.50)	0.77	III
4	Piggery, poultry and rabbit from government and private farms	23 (14.40)	48 (30.00)	89 (55.60)	0.59	IV
5	Addresses of Veterinary Hospitals, names and addresses of doctors	11 (6.90)	60 (37.50)	89 (55.60)	0.51	V
6	Annual productivity of egg, meat, milk, broiler and economics (cost: benefit)	13 (8.10)	52 (32.50)	95 (59.40)	0.49	VI
7	Govt. incentives for agri-business	6 (3.80)	25 (15.60)	129 (80.60)	0.23	VII
8	Techniques and incentives available for food-processing units	7 (4.40)	21 (13.10)	132 (82.50)	0.23	VIII
9	Meat / pork / beef preservation and processing techniques	2 (1.30)	27 (16.90)	131 (81.90)	0.19	IX
10	All aspects related to fish farm, fish-seed availability, rearing, health care, market for ornamental fish, etc.	4 (2.50)	18 (11.30)	138 (86.30)	0.16	X

(Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Information Needs of RMG Members on Personal and Family Health

Information needs on personal and family health are presented in Table 6. About 45 per cent of the respondents "always" needed information on vaccination programmes (1st rank). RMG members also needed information to a lesser extent on prevention against AIDS (2nd rank), health services-hospitals, govt. policies, medical stores and other facilities (3rd rank), individual and social hygiene (4th rank), prevention against chronic diseases like cough, cold, asthma etc. (5th rank). The results are in agreement with the findings of CRISP (2003).

Table 6. Distribution of RMG Members according to their Information Needs on Personal and Family health (N=160)

Sl. No.	Information Needs	Always		Some times		Never		Mean	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Vaccination programmes	72	45.00	84	52.50	4	2.50	1.43	I
2	Prevention against AIDS	44	27.50	105	65.60	11	6.90	1.21	II
3	Health services-hospitals, govt. policies, medical stores and other facilities.	36	22.50	112	70.00	12	7.50	1.15	III
4	Individual and social hygiene	23	14.40	109	68.10	28	17.50	0.97	IV
5	Prevention against chronic diseases (cough, cold, asthma etc.)	24	15.00	98	61.30	38	23.80	0.91	V

Information Needs of RMG Members in Education

It may be seen in Table 7 that more than half (64.40 per cent) of the respondents were “always” in need of information on educational loans (1st rank). This might be due to increased awareness about education and to make their children obtain higher education though their financial resources were not sufficient enough to meet these needs. Hence they might be interested to know more about these aspects. They also need information on quality school education (2nd rank), career counseling and coaching facilities (3rd rank), quality higher education (4th rank) and new courses and colleges (5th rank).

Table 7. Distribution of RMG Members on Information Needs in Education (N=160)

Sr. No.	Information Needs	Always		Some times		Never		Mean	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Educational loans	103	64.40	44	27.50	13	8.10	1.56	I
2	Quality school education	63	39.40	79	49.40	18	11.30	1.28	II
3	Career counseling and coaching facilities	53	33.10	74	46.30	33	20.60	1.13	III
4	Quality higher education	38	23.80	98	61.30	24	15.00	1.09	IV
5	New courses and colleges	40	25.00	93	58.10	27	16.90	1.08	V
6	Changes in the education system (from marking system to grading system)	10	6.20	75	46.90	75	46.90	0.59	VI
7	Govt. initiatives and policies	10	6.20	72	45.00	78	48.80	0.57	VII

The respondents were least interested in knowing about changes in the education system (from marking system to grading system) (6th rank), government initiatives and policies (7th rank). The findings are in agreement with the findings of CRISP (2003).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded from the above findings that majority of the RMG members needed information regarding different areas relating to agricultural development. Majority of the RMG members needed information regarding soil conservation and forest management, water resources sector, education, agriculture and horticulture, animal husbandry, sericulture, fisheries and allied fields. Hence it is suggested that the extension workers should provide information on these sectors through suitable extension methods.

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