

Chapter 4

The Impact of Kisan Call Centers on the Farming Sector

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Agriculture has been an area with varied challenges. This sector is responsible for the growth rate and generating a per capita income. This sector generates a whopping 28% of the total GDP of India and over 15% of the total exports. The usage of Internet and phone technology can fill these gaps to a large extent. A continuous two way interaction among the farmers and agricultural scientists will ensure agricultural extension. A landmark step was taken on January 21, 2004 when the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation, launched Kisan Call Centers (KCC) with the help of the extensive telecom industry to deliver extension services to the farming community. The main purpose of these call centers is to answer the queries raised by the farmers in their local language, on continuous basis. At present the Kisan Call Centers are running from 14 locations all over India. In this chapter, we are trying to analyze how this strategy to help the farming community was introduced and how it is being implemented.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9621-9.ch004

INTRODUCTION

The role of agriculture in India's socio-economic development is inherent since ancient times. Even today agriculture forms a significant part of the GDP and overall growth and sustainability of India. This sector provides employment to 51% of the total workforce, being the largest economic sector amongst others such as mining, tourism, retail, textile, industry and services. That being mentioned, the challenges before the agricultural practices in India are immense. It will not only benefit the overall economic progress of the country, but is also essential for the workforce of the nation, two thirds of which, directly or indirectly depends on the same. It contributes to around 27% of the GDP of India and somewhere around 13-16% of the exports. Still, the yields are not only lesser than expected, they are highly unstable and the gaps in technology transfer are much more intense as compared to those in areas that are irrigated.

Kisan call center is a Government of India initiative under the department of Agriculture and Co-operation. This initiative is primarily aimed towards assisting the farmer community for any issues or queries that they may have and also in training them to face the immense inevitable challenges. These knowledge centers are active throughout India providing services to farmers in terms of assistance and guidance in solving their problems in their regional local languages. Providing a structure to this entire operation of query handling involves effective use of technology, networking, a strong knowledge base, technically educated and informed staff. These call centers make use of an extensive telecommunication network, having a strong back end Management Information System to address the queries of farmers across the country, regarding agriculture practices and latest farming techniques. The scheme's objective is to serve the farming community spread over 5 lakh villages across the nation.

The need of the hour is to pay greater and more focused attention to information by extensively using the appropriate tools and technologies that help farmers cope up with the diverse challenges and learn new opportunities on a continuous basis. To capitalize on future export opportunities of agriculture products, the country needs to match global standards in terms of quality, stability and hygiene. Hence, the farmer should be aware and informed of the latest efficient agricultural practices.

The Kisan Call Center aims to fulfill the following:

- Fast and effective spreading of information
- Minimizing the gap between Farmer and Research Labs, agriculture universities, market, corporates
- On demand specific individual knowledge transfer and adequate facilitation
- Efficient use of the huge and complex telecom infrastructure

While the state of Kentucky, US is following GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) to ensure safety from post production diseases in the crops, and the GAP in Rome (Italy) are focused on setting up protocols and appropriate processes, the services provided by KCC are rather educational and informative in nature. They aim to educate the farmer with innovative and new technologies and techniques that should be implemented in order to yield better results.

Recently, to facilitate the queries of the farming community in an easier way, the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation has come up with an idea of Kisan SMS (Short Messaging Service) Portal. The users have to register and enroll themselves via a mobile number. Once registered, the user will receive regular updates about weather and agricultural alerts, absolutely free of cost. In this case, a farmer will be getting an SMS messages providing expert information and delivering services on his mobile from

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