

**CONSULTATION ON ATTRACTING AND RETAINING YOUTH IN
FARMING HELD ON 28TH MAY, 2006 – SUMMING-UP BY
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1. There are currently 45 Agricultural and Veterinary Universities in the country including Deemed Universities. Over 21000 Agricultural Graduates and Post Graduates are becoming available each year. Farming is become knowledge intensive and there is need for retaining Farm Graduates and Home Science Graduates in our villages in order to achieve the desired technological upgrading of farm enterprises. We need a national strategy for the knowledge and skill empowerment of farm families. At present, most of the Farm Graduates are either taking jobs in Government or Financial Institutions or in Private Sector industry. They are seldom taking to farming as a profession. This is not surprising, since according to the NSSO over 40% of farmers would like to quit farming. There is an urgent need for increasing the productivity, profitability and sustainability of major farming systems in the country through synergy between technology and public policy.

2. There are several ongoing technology transfer and extension mechanisms. The latest addition is the ATMA. Krishi Vigyan Kendras, lab-to-land programmes and regular extension services also exist. In spite of these efforts the gap between scientific know-how and field level do-how is widening. This is why it is essential that steps are taken to attract and retain educated youth in farming. They can help to empower rural women and men with new skills and technologies including Biotechnology, Information Communication Technology and Renewable Energy Technology. They can also help to provide need-based services including appropriate and good quality seeds and other inputs at the right time and place. Extension of knowledge and inputs needed to apply that knowledge at the field level will have to be concurrent.

3. There has to be a two-pronged strategy for attracting and retaining educated youth in farming. Farm graduates who own land should be encouraged to take to farming as a profession. **Farm schools** on the lines recommended by NCF in its First Report, could be established in the fields of such Farm graduates who are operating agricultural enterprises efficiently. Secondly, Farm Graduates who do not own land can be assisted to provide demand driven services through Agri-clinics, Agri-business centres, Food Parks, etc. There should be Capacity Building and Mentoring Centres to assist Farm Graduates to set up Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres. To the extent possible, groups of 3-4 Graduates can be formed for running these enterprises. For providing Mentoring and Hand-holding Services, professors and scientists as well as NGOs could be enlisted. Arrangements should also be made for the Farm graduates to undergo apprenticeship in suitable Companies.

4. Government should consider the following services to Farm graduates: Low interest loans, venture capital funds, allotment of wasteland for setting up Agri-clinics and Agri-business Centres and facilities for establishing **Gyan Choupals** or Village Knowledge Centres. Self Help Groups of Farm graduates including women and men could be formed to avail of the new credit facility for SHGs and for undertaking a variety of market driven enterprises such as production of organic foods, bio-fuels, bamboo cultivation, etc. Groups of Farm Graduates can also be encouraged to form Producer Companies for undertaking the production of good quality seeds, agro processing, marketing, etc. They should be trained in Contract Farming methodology which benefits both the producer and the purchaser. Government may also consider providing land in State Farms for organizing seed production, livestock breeding, etc. The production of planting material and seeds necessary for the National Horticulture Mission could be undertaken by men and women Farm graduates.

5. In the case of medical and veterinary sciences, there is a system of registration of practitioners. It would be useful to develop a system for according recognition to Farm Graduates to provide Extension and other services by recognizing them as **Registered Farm Practitioners**. It may be necessary to set up an All India Agricultural Council on the model of the Medical and Veterinary Councils to give such accreditation. This will also be an oversight mechanism to ensure the quality and credibility of the services provided by farm practitioners.

6. There is need for a few Centres of Excellence in Agriculture (Crop and Animal Husbandry, Fishery and Forestry) on the model of IITs and the IIMs. The Agricultural Universities Association should not only bring about curriculum reform for imparting more practical training, but also reforms in the pedagogic methodology taking into account the new opportunities opened up by ICT for promoting a learning revolution among our students. By suitably restructuring the pedagogic methodology using ICT tools, it will be possible to save time for practical work. Agricultural Universities should also organize more non-degree training programmes. All Farm Universities should adopt the motto "**Every Student an Entrepreneur**". Entrepreneurship and innovation must be the key goals of Universities.

7. Areas like the North Eastern Region and Jammu & Kashmir requires special attention from the point of view of providing Farm Graduates with opportunities for gainful self-employment. For this purpose each State should organize a Recognition and Mentoring Programme (RAMP). In the hilly areas there is a particular need for service centres for farm machinery.

8. The Tenth Plan has called for paradigm shift from food security at the national level to nutritional security at the individual level. There are very large numbers of Home Science Graduates who are unemployed or inappropriately employed. A new scheme should be formulated for organizing **Nutritional Clinics** on the model of Agri-clinics which will provide an opportunity for Home Science Graduates to ensure the success of ICDS and mid-day meal programme and to fight hidden hunger caused by the deficiency of micro-nutrient in the diet.

9. The facilities for practical training for Farm Graduates must be expanded. The Vidya Dairy at Anand which impart end-to-end training as well as the Fish For All Training Centre which is being established by MSSRF at Nagapatnam are good examples of imparting skills through learning-by- doing. This move could be extended to all important commodities like lac, sericulture, ornamental fish production, etc.

10. Agricultural Universities should expand their current Placement Bureau in order to provide a special one-stop window for generating awareness of self-employment opportunities. Job Fairs can also be organized. Industry representatives feel that there is considerable unmet demand in relation to the range of services needed to farm families. There is therefore considerable scope for training Farm graduates to provide demand driven services. Agricultural entrepreneurs are needed in large numbers for achieving successful farming systems diversification and value addition and for providing the right inputs at the time and at the right place. Mobile phones have made communication easy. Farmers will be willing to pay for value added services.

11. There is need for a **National Alliance** for facilitating self-employment. Such an alliance can bring together all the stake-holders – Private and Public Sector Institutions, Commercial and Cooperative Banks and Farm Graduates Associations. Such a National Alliance can provide oversight for the implementation of a national strategy for the knowledge and skill empowerment of rural families and for imparting quality and trade literacy. They can also monitor progress in achieving the goal of every student entrepreneur in our Agricultural and Veterinary Universities.

12. The process of preparation of the Eleventh Five Year Plan has started. In the Eleventh Plan there is need for an integrated strategy of providing the services needed by farm families and for making our agriculture knowledge intensive. The strategy developed for this purpose should include providing space for self-employed Farm Graduates in undertaking enterprises and services which will help them to earn their living. At the moment Government is running parallel services which are mostly free and therefore opportunities for earning by Farm Graduates are very limited. Therefore while designing the new strategy for the scientific

transformation of crop and animal husbandry, fishery, agro-forestry and agri-business, there is need for integrated planning and action so that the different actors (Government, industry and Farm graduates) all have well defined spaces. There must be synergy and convergence in the different initiatives.

13. The Prime Minister addressing the B.P.Pal Birth Centenary International Conference on 28th May made the following observation:

“There are no new big ideas on how we can extend the benefits of modern science and technology effectively to our farmers and on new pathways to revitalize this sector.”

The formation of a National Alliance for scientific transformation of Indian agriculture through extensive participation of educated youth in the knowledge and skill empowerment of farm women and men and in providing a range of services will help to achieve the above stated objective of the Prime Minister.

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