

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

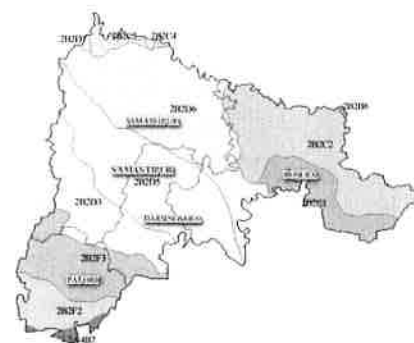
Pankaj

Kumar Baitha is a resident of the village of Maniyarpur, in the Kalyanpur district of Samastipur. About the initiative he comments enthusiastically: "I came to know about this endeavour during a meeting on agriculture, which I attended in my village. People of the foundation were talking about an Agri Van. I was excited when I heard about this van, and was curious to know what it was all about. I reached the van with a diseased sample of my crop, as this was a matter of grave concern for me and was soon explained about the disease, its causes and how it could be effectively controlled. The staff also encouraged me to pose questions on other farming-related issues like seed variety, crop diseases, soil testing, technologies available and different government schemes. I went back a satisfied man because not only was the disease of my crop identified, but I was provided logical and organic solutions too. Besides this, nutrient information, on the basis of soil testing, helps us save money as well. This is important too."



What is interesting to note is that the mobile agri clinic, which is armed with the latest technology, is designed to address people from different backgrounds. For example if a farmer would like to know about a particular disease affecting a

particular crop, but is not able to define it in his or her own words, the digital library comes to the rescue. With a vast collection of photographs of ingenious crops and possible diseases that could plague them, the farmer can easily identify the problem by looking at the photograph displayed on a 32 inches LCD screen; once this is done, the process of eradication is started, but in an 'organic' way: prevention, bio remedies and then any chemical intervention, if required. A print-out of this information is also provided, which can be photocopied and distributed in case the need stands. The public address system reads out the information supplied on the sheet, in a concise form, enabling those who cannot read, to listen, understand and



comprehend. The Mobile Clinic also hosts a soil-testing facility. Diverse information material is also provided on a wide variety of subjects.

Program Leader, Agriculture Development Programme, Sehgal Foundation: "Our long association with farmers has helped us understand their needs and challenges. There exists a gap between information present, its retrieval, understanding and application. This is what led us to this initiative. If you ask me, how this initiative is different from other similar initiatives, I would readily say that this mobile agri clinic is unique in its basic concept and approach. Besides information on agricultural and agronomical aspects including allied fields too, information is also provided on all government schemes valid for that particular state. The registration process enables us to maintain a record of the number and type of queries, besides other factors, which serve as useful indicators for trends and patterns." Arvind Rana says.

Ram Dular Mahto, a resident of village Mahabalipur, in the Kalyanpur district of Samastipur adds: "When the van visited our village, I asked about the problem my Brinjal crop was facing; the staff registered me and explained about the damage done and, most importantly, about how it can be controlled. I was happy with the solution. The best part is that the van visits our village from time to time, which makes it easier to follow-up on queries."



"Besides informing us about various agriculture-related issues, both through the visual medium and also orally, we are also informed about all government-sponsored schemes. In fact, there is also a toll-free number where I can pose questions related to almost any problem," says Aditya Bhushan, a resident of the village Ladaura, in the Kalyanpur district of Samastipur.

The initiative, which started around 1.5 months ago, has seen approximately 817 registrations so far and has covered around 40 villages. Of the 20 days in a

month, 2 villages are covered a day, with the van remaining for a period of about 4 hours in a particular village before moving on to the next. This enables even women to partake in the initiative.

"Though the challenge remains in regularly updating and customizing the digital library and information material, the response has been overwhelming, which is why there are plans to take this initiative to other areas like Jharkhand too, amongst others," says Rana.

