

Farmer Participatory Research

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What is Farmer Participatory Research?

Farmer participatory research is an approach, which involves encouraging farmers to engage in experiments in their own fields so that they can learn, adopt new technologies and spread them to other farmers. With the scientist acting as facilitator, farmers and scientists closely work together from initial design of the research project to data gathering, analysis, final conclusions, and follow-up actions. This step, sometimes known as innovation evaluation is essential for communication as well as for initiating diffusion. The main advantage of this approach is that farmers “learn by doing” and decision rules are modified on the basis of direct experience. To shape learning, interpretations of experience must provide information about what happened, why it happened and whether what happened was satisfactory or unsatisfactory. New information, technologies and concepts may be better communicated to farmers through the FPR approach.

How is FPR carried out?

1. Planning meeting

Initiate participatory experiments in collaboration with the local agricultural extension technician and the village head. In each village or district, invite 10 to 25 farmers. With the researcher acting as the facilitator, conduct group meetings with farmers. These half-day meetings can begin with general discussions about rice growing and related problems. Later, discussions should focus on the topic of relevance to both farmers and researchers. For instance, in pest management, the discussions may focus on the rice leaffolder, concerns about their damages, losses they could cause and methods of control. Encourage farmers to discuss whether the leaffolder needed control and whether anyone would volunteer to participate in evaluating a simple hypothesis.



Researchers, local extension groups and farmers meet to discuss and plan activities.

2. Laying out the experiment

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Each participating farmer would mark out an area of about 100 m² in his or her field that would not receive any insecticide treatment in the first 30 days after transplanting. The rest of his or her field would receive normal treatments. All other agronomic practices in both the experiment and main plots would be according to each farmer's normal practice. During the cropping season, the extension technician and researcher will make at least one follow-up visit to each participant.

Researchers, extension and farmers review a farmer experiment plot.

3. Support materials

Provide participating farmers with some support materials, as follows:

- A signboard (30 cm x 60 cm) with the farmer's name, collaborating agencies and the experimental title for display in each participant's field.
- Two comics strips depicting a discussion of a farmer who had done the experiment in local language
- A cardboard file with weekly activity sheets and a ball-point pen for recording farming activities and input costs.
- A set of instructions to conduct farmer participatory research.

4. Monitoring

Before the experiments begin, conduct a short pre-FPR or baseline survey primarily to allow subsequent comparison of yields and costs of the practice of interest (e.g., insecticide applications in the case of leaffolder) from the experimental and main plots. Determine their practices (e.g., insecticide use patterns), and knowledge and attitude towards the problem (e.g., leaf feeding insects). The second survey could focus on farmers' practices, costs, perception of yield differences and benefits derived from applying the "new" treatment (e.g., not using early season insecticide sprays for leaffolder control).



Talk to farmers about their problems, practices, costs and perceptions

5. Farmer experience sharing workshop

At the end of the season, organize a workshop where farmers will report their experimental results. Invite neighboring farmers and local extension technicians. Preferably a week before the workshop, help each participating farmer to prepare his report on the results. Have a one-page cost and yield comparison between treated and untreated plots. During the workshop encourage farmers to discuss possible reasons for yield differences and their plans for the next season.

As a token of appreciation, give each participant a t-shirt or a cap and a certificate of participation.



6. Farmer-to-farmer spread

To monitor diffusion, ask farmers in a monitoring survey for names and addresses of other farmers with whom they had directly shared the results of their experiments. Track down the farmers who heard about the experiment from the first group and had followed the simple rule that was tried out in FPR. If most of them are neighbors and relative, it could suggest that the spread may be through kinship and close proximity of their neighbors.

7. Upscaling

With the help of media, such as newspapers, radio and television, spread may be further enhanced. The use of these approaches may be explored in the future. Since encouraging farmers to experiment with a simple rule-of-thumb can be easily communicated in informal talks, farmer-to-farmer spread of experiences from the experimentation may be further enhanced.



Poster can be an effective way of disseminating improved practices

References

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