

Guest Editorial

Information Systems for Agriculture in India

India is essentially an agrarian society and basically depends on agricultural outputs. It is therefore, essential that the technology thrust should lay greater emphasis on the transfer of scientific and technological information from the research institutes to its actual users. Communication systems and information technology has opened new vistas for transfer of technology between the generators and the users of information in least possible time. It has become a medium of communication of ideas, a resource for research and development necessary for the sustenance and promotion of the progress and prosperity of the country through agriculture. Advancement of Science and Technology has given rise to a proliferation of scientific literature and information and same holds good for agricultural and allied sciences including veterinary, fisheries and forestry.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations in the early seventies came up with two global information systems—AGRIS and CARIS—and requested the member countries to cooperate in their venture. The Government of India took a decision in 1974 to participate in the global systems through a National Input Centre under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the apex body for agricultural research and development in the country.

This was the beginning of information systems and services in India using computer technology. With the help of magnetic tapes, a SDI service was started as early as in 1978 and India became an active partner in the world-wide system. A number of computer-aided products were made available to the scientific community.

It had now been possible to link the ICAR Research Institutes, State Agricultural Universities, Zonal Research Stations and Project Directorates with the help of the communication satellite of the National Informatics Centre (NICNET) of Planning Commission, Government of India by providing them with LAN server and PC workstations and e-mail connectivity.

Now-a-days libraries are playing a very important role in providing information to the users by building good collections of books, monographs and serials. Several ICAR institutes and State Agricultural Universities have good libraries. It is interesting to note that the library of the Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI) (estd 1905) has over a million entries in the catalogue. The computerisation of catalogues in most of the libraries yet to be done due to the non-availability of trained manpower in the field of agricultural library and information systems and services. There is no organisation which gives training to agricultural librarians and information scientists; as a result the development of a proper Agricultural Research Information System has not reached the desired level.

Publication of agricultural books, periodicals and related literature is very important both from the point of view of research scientist and extension workers. Another aspect which deserves proper attention is feedback to press the need for a modern agricultural journalism where the role of an editor is key to the growth of agriculture.

Some of these aspects are discussed in the three papers included in this issue with a view of develop a national agricultural research information system.

This special issue of DBIT on Information Systems for Agriculture would be useful to the scientist at large either at ICAR, CSIR or DRDO (Food laboratories, military farms, etc.).

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