

vii. Use Information, Communication and Technology [ICT] for bringing farmer closer to market

In order to reap the benefits of modern technology, dependence on traditional Government machinery for provision of various training and extension services might not be an appropriate strategy for obvious reasons. A paradigm shift in the perspective of transfer of technology and dissemination of value added information for agrarian prosperity is the need of the hour in Assam. A holistic rural extension, which integrates farm and non-farm enterprises, would bring about much needed pace of growth in the agriculture sector and to the other spheres of rural development. It will be the roadmap for rural transformation in the new world trade order.

Special emphasis should be given to eco-friendly technologies, Intensive Integrated Farming Systems [IIFS], precision farming technologies and value addition at the farm level through adoption of information technology. MSSR Foundation has perfected the technology on precision farming. It has also developed what is called a Virtual Academy for Food Security and Rural Prosperity (VARP) by bringing technology to the doorsteps of farmers.

The new agri-business models have one common thread running through them- integrating and tightening the supply chain. It also helps them to adopt improved farm practices for increased productivity. It is a win-win situation for both the farmers and the corporates.

e-Choupal of ITC offers farmers real time prices of commodities and helps them in price discovery of commodities - Soya in MP, Wheat in UP, Fisheries in AP, Coffee in Karnataka. The unique selling proposition [USP] ITC's e-choupal model lies in the "e". It believes in leveraging information technology to cluster all the value chain participants, delivering the same benefits as vertical integration as in mature agricultural economies in the world.

Assam should take steps to use ICT and create a more dependable data base on all agricultural matters including land records and make available to the farmers. All blocks should be linked through its network which should be extended to all the villages in the state over a period of 2-3 years. This would help the state in keeping all land records in electronic form and providing the same to the farmers for their use. Absence of providing proper land records is often a hurdle to credit flow from institutional sources. This would also help the state to get a better bearing of the agriculture sector, where at present, almost all information are generated based on estimates.

Sanchalaks - Feeding the Farmers' information

*Across various villages in interior MP, Karnataka, UP and AP, ITC's e-choupals holding internet enabled desktops and printers positioned at the residence of a progressive farmer carefully chosen [called **Sanchalak**], give live quotes of not only ITC's own prices, but also prevailing prices in mandis across the states. This helps the farmers to discover the prices and take an informed decision in marketing of their crops. **Sanchalaks** also provide to the community ready information on the weather, disseminate knowledge on scientific farm practices and risk management, facilitate the sale of farm inputs and offer to purchase farm produce from the doorsteps of the farmers. Farmers are benefited as they get alternative to mandis.*

Road Map for Agrarian Prosperity in Assam

Assam should also create conditions for corporates like ITC ltd., to set up e-Choupals in potential areas which offer them their market driven agri-products like wheat, oil seeds, etc. A dialogue with such corporates of international presence would help in opening new opportunities for the farmers who traditionally produce some food grain crops without any direction. The State should also have a Kisan Call Centre for providing all the qualitative information to the farmers.