Farmer categorization for an agricultural extension programme

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An agricultural extension programme has been implemented in two rice-growing villages, *Malana* and *Pahala Vitiyala* of *Matara* district. An effort was made to evaluate the farmers' knowledge pertaining to pesticide applications prior to the introduction of the extension programme in *yala* season 1999. The objectives of this evaluation were to; reveal the existing knowledge, identify the potential of increasing farmers' knowledge through an extension programme and categorize the target population on the knowledge scale. Further, this effort facilitated as a benchmark study to launch an agricultural extension programme and results of the evaluation can be compared with the outcome of the future evaluations.

The ballet box test was employed to estimate the existing knowledge. In separate occasions 18 and 20 farmers of *Malana* and *Pahala Vitiyala* participated in this exercise. The results illustrates that in two target groups, the existing knowledge ranges from 30% to 75%. However, the mean knowledge score of *Malana* and *Pahala Vitiyala* indicated as 48.5% and 47.5%, respectively. Hence, there is no significant knowledge variation between the two target groups. This, In fact, indicates that similar extension programme with same content, methodology and resources can be utilized for the two target groups. In fact, Farmer Field School was employed as the extension method.

Based on mean and standard deviation, four knowledge categories were identified as very low, low, medium and high. This categorization reveals that very low and low categories together claim for 44% and 55% of the farmers in *Malana* and *Pahala Vitiyala* target groups, respectively. Therefore, there is a great potential to increase the existing knowledge pertaining to pesticide applications. In this context, concentrated extension efforts are warranted and therefore, systematic deployment of IPM techniques can be viewed as a viable venture.

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