

## Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP)

### RAMP GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING FARMER DEMONSTRATION PLOTS

For FHCRAA/ICARDA Job Order  
“Demonstrating New Technologies in Farmers’ Fields  
to Facilitate Rapid Adoption and Diffusion”

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## **RAMP GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING FARMER DEMONSTRATION PLOTS: For FHCRAA/ICARDA Job Order**

These guidelines are designed to support and enhance the effectiveness of the first RAMP objective – Increasing Agricultural Production and Output. This involves getting producers (farmers) to adopt new practices which will increase their production and comply with market requirements at a cost effective level.

These guidelines are designed to supplement and compliment the FHCRAA/ICARDA job order, “Demonstrating New Technologies in Farmers’ Fields to Facilitate Rapid Adoption and Diffusion.” It is envisioned that the methodology developed and tested through this job order will be shared and adapted with other job orders focusing on increased production, such as grapes, cotton, chickens, etc. These guidelines build on and expand the job order prepared by FHCRAA/ICARDA focusing on how to make the farmer demonstration plots effective communication tools.

Research throughout the world has shown that farmers are the most important channel of communication influencing other farmers to adopt new practices. The most powerful diffusion tool developed by extension agencies is the “result demonstration plot” which is placed on farms. Therefore, this task is at the heart of increasing agriculture production. If the farmers aren’t selected correctly or the demonstration plots are not set up correctly, this program could fail and even set back the adoption process. It is essential that technical specialists work closely with extension specialists and agricultural communicators to ensure this program is successfully implemented.

- a. **Key Stakeholders and Their Roles** – This task is based upon years (beginning in 1935) of work done throughout the world by rural sociologists and other groups to understand the diffusion of innovations and the adoption process. Building upon this rich diffusion of innovations knowledge base, the following stakeholder groups will be involved in this communication task supporting the farmer demonstration plots:
  - **Farmers** – diffusion of innovations research has shown that farmers have the greatest influence on getting other farmers to adopt new best practices. This is why farmer demonstration plots are being used. Farmers seek advice and information from other farmers and if they can see the results in their neighbor’s field it is even more powerful. In the diffusion process, the third stage is “trial” where farmers will test a best practice in a small area of their farm. The demonstration plots on neighbor’s farms often can serve as this trial phase for other farmers.
  - **Input dealers** – in most cases, the second most important source of information for farmers are the input dealers – seed, fertilizer, chemicals, animal feed, veterinary supplies, etc. When farmers are buying their inputs, this is the “most teachable moment” with farmers seeking information and advice on how to use these inputs. This means that the input dealers and their salesmen must understand the recommended best practices related to their products.
  - **Other local influential groups** – farmers can receive information and be influenced by a number of local groups, such as market buyers, processors,

local leaders, school teachers, religious leaders, etc. More needs to be known on which of these groups are the most important that farmers seek or receive information and what is their credibility and believability – which groups have the greatest influence on farmers..

- **Mass media** – the diffusion process research has found that mass media plays a unique role. It is generally very effective in the awareness stage (first stage of the diffusion process) where it can reach large numbers of people at low cost and make them aware of new best practices. The research has shown, however, that as target groups go through the diffusion process towards the adoption stage, mass media is less effective and interpersonal communications becomes the primary communication channel. The adoption stage requires two way communications with influential people. This explains why the above three stakeholder groups must be involved in this program as they are the interpersonal channels of communications to farmers.
  - **Research and Extension Agencies** – while at the current time the agricultural research and extension agencies in Afghanistan are very weak, it is essential they be involved in this demonstration program so that in the future they can continue operating the program. The research staff should work with ICARDA to create information packages for the recommended best practices so that this information can be shared widely to other groups who are also working with farmers. The regional research stations and extension staffs need to be involved to help implement the demonstration program and in the process to strengthen their capabilities. Extension personnel will be used to help establish the demonstration plots, monitor what the participating farmers do in maintaining the plots and help organize field days. There needs to be a two-way flow of information between the researchers, the sources of best practices, and farmers who are the ultimate users of the best practices.
- b. **Criteria for Selecting Demonstration Farms** – It is critical that the correct farmers are selected to participate in this demonstration program.
- **Production potential** – the farm must represent a typical farm in the area in terms of soil type, water availability and other agronomic conditions to ensure that if best practices are followed the production results will be good. At the same time, these conditions must not be far superior to that of other farms in the area. Farmers normally are very good at judging if the demonstration plot results will work on their farms.
  - **Location** – it is essential that the farm and demonstration plots be located next to a road where large numbers of farmers regularly pass by. Signs will be posted to ensure that neighboring farmers understand what the plots are demonstrating so they can observe what is happening throughout the growing season. They should also be located so that it is easy to transport farmers, input dealers and other influential groups for field days.
  - **Farmer credibility and innovativeness** – the farmers selected must be respected by their neighbors and be local opinion leaders. In the diffusion literature they are referred to as being “early adopters” who are just far enough ahead of the majority of farmers to be recognized as being leaders. (The true “innovators” who are the first to try new practices often are thought of as being crack pots, being too far ahead of the majority, and therefore are often not respected by other farmers.)

- **Farmer's communication skills** – the farmers selected to have the demonstration plots must be willing and able to communicate to others what best practices they are using and demonstrate the results. This also means that the teams working with these farmers must be sure to explain what is being done and why. A major part of the communication with other farmers will be done throughout the growing season when farmers stop at the demonstration plot and ask the host farmer questions. The participating farmers must be prepared for and be willing to engage in this continuous communication. Field days are only part of the communication outreach program.
- c. **Communication Activities to Enhance the Effectiveness of Demonstration Plots** – The farmer demonstration plots can serve as a base or platform for a multidimensional communication program to farmers and other key stakeholder groups. The following are some of communications activities that should be integrated into the farmer demonstration program:
- **Identification of the plots** – this involves preparing and posting signs identifying the plots and the various best practices being used, such as varieties, seeding rate, fertilizer types and rates, weed control, etc.
  - **Displays/posters describing the best practices** – where appropriate, there should be displays or posters giving more information on the best practices and why they are important. These posters can also be posted at local input dealers, market centers and other locations where farmers visit.
  - **Briefing sheets for giving to influential groups** – best practices fact sheets should be prepared describing the best practices being used which should be given to influential groups (such as input dealers, teachers, extension agents, etc.) and to literate farmers. These fact sheets could be given out at field days and other times.
  - **Farmer field days** – one or more field days for farmers should be organized during the growing season and near harvest time. These should be publicized with posters and possibly by radio to attract the largest number of farmers to participate. Transport for visiting farmers and refreshments should be provided.
  - **Stakeholder and influential group field days and briefings** – it is also recommended that a special field day be organized for groups such supply input dealers, market buyers, extension agents, teachers, media representatives and other influential groups. They would be provided additional information and be encouraged to promote the best practices to farmers. During this field day they would be given the fact sheets on the best practices so that they have sufficient information to communicate to farmers.
  - **Yield results fact sheets for media and influential groups** – at harvest time the yields need to be recorded, the information packaged and disseminated to others. This could be done with posters at the demonstration site and other locations in the community. Fact sheets summarizing the results need to be prepared and disseminated to influential groups and to local radio stations.
- d. **Work Plan** – The following lists the major steps in implementing this communication support program:
- **Secure correct supply inputs** – it is essential that the correct supply inputs are provided to the participating farmers. If this is not done then the

communication program will be ineffective and the demonstration plots could fail.

- **Enlist participating farmers and brief them on their responsibilities** – working with the community leaders and participating extension agents, using the criteria listed above, recruit farmers who will provide the land and labor for the demonstration plots, and will be effective communicators to other farmers.
- **Prepare the identification signs and educational posters** – these will be installed at the time of planting the demonstration plots. These should be large enough and be placed so that farmers and others coming by on the road can read the signs. There should be space at the edge of road so people can stop and look at the plots.
- **Prepare best practices fact sheets** – these are fact sheets summarizing the best practices and answering questions which farmers may have. These will be disseminated during the field days and used in many other ways with influential groups who will communicate the information to farmers.
- **Train participating extension workers** – training needs to be done for the extension workers who are involved in helping select farmers, set up the demonstration plots, monitor what the farmer does and help organize field days. The extension workers need to be carefully selected and trained on the best practices and how to work with the farmers who are hosting the demonstration plots. The training should include some actual meetings with farmers so their performance can be evaluated – both technical content and relationships with farmers.
- **Brief/train the participating farmers on the best practices being used** – the participating farmers will need to be trained on the best practices being demonstrated including the importance of their following basic instructions in order to ensure good results. The participating farmers need to be prepared so that they can answer questions other farmers may ask them.
- **Establish the demonstration plots and monitor their progress** – working with the participating farmers and local extension agents, lay out the demonstration plots, oversee the planting and other best practices, and plan the schedule of events for the entire cropping season.
- **Monitor the demonstration plot implementation** – throughout the growing season the ICARDA field team need to repeatedly check on what the participating farmers are doing to implement the best practices and ensure that the recommended practices are working correctly. In most cases this will be done by the participating extension workers who should keep a log book on what was done, how many farmers visited the demonstration plots, yields, and other information. If there are problems with a demonstration plot immediate corrective actions need to be taken explaining to the farmer what has to be done. In extreme cases where the problem can not be corrected the demonstration plot should be terminated. A failed demonstration plot can set back the diffusion of best practices to other farmers.
- **Explore identifying local village motivators** – in some areas there are local leaders who can serve as motivators encouraging farmers to visit the demonstration plots and relaying information on the best practices being used. The team working with the participating farmers should be on the look out for potential village motivators who could be a school teacher, religious leader, NGO, etc.

- **Monitor the on-going passerby and visitor communication with participating farmers** – when visiting the participating farmers ask them for estimates of how many people have looked at the demonstration plots and how many have asked questions or wanted more information. The participating extension workers should put this information into their log books.
  - **Organize farmer field days at appropriate times during the growing season** – the schedule of events should determine if there will be one or more field days. This will be determined by how best to show off the recommended practices. One should be near to harvest time so other farmers can see the yield results. The farmer field days will be promoted in the region with posters and, where appropriate, through radio.
  - **Organize briefing field days for input dealers and other influential groups** – field days should be organized for special influential groups such as input dealers, market buyers, teachers, mass media representatives, etc. These field days need to be promoted with handbill announcements, invitations, etc. directed to the targeted influential groups.
  - **Prepare fact sheets summarizing yields and other successes** – when the plots are harvested, the yields should be recorded and the information put into fact sheets. Other successes in demonstrating the best practices should be recorded and put into the fact sheets – a summary of what was accomplished, when, etc. These fact sheets should be disseminated to influential groups, media, etc. There should also be posters at the demonstration plot site giving the yield information.
  - **Decide what is to be done the following year** – it should be decided at the end of the cropping season what farmer will be asked to host demonstration plots the following year. In most cases, new farmers in different locations should be recruited in order to expand the knowledge base and spread the best practices to more farmers.
- e. **Resource Needs/Budget** – The following budget items may need to be added to the FHCRAA/ICARDA farmer demonstration job order. The actual cost information will have to be developed based upon the number of plots and available cost information.
- Signs for identifying the demonstration plots and best practices
  - Displays/posters describing the best practices
  - Briefing fact sheets on the best practices (production, printing & distribution)
  - Promoting farmer field days (posters, radio, etc.)
  - Transportation for bringing farmers to field days and other costs (maybe food, drink, etc.)
  - Promoting field days for special influential groups (handbills, invitations, etc.)
  - Conducting the field days for influential groups (refreshments, etc.)
  - Yield fact sheets and posters

The cost for ICARDA staff time and participating extension workers for recruiting the farmers and establishing the demonstration plots is already included in the FHCRAA/ICARDA job order.