

IPM IL integrated pest management innovation lab success story

FREQUENCIES FOR FARMERS:

IPM training over the airwaves in India

An IPM Innovation Lab radio school, the first of its kind organized by the program, trains hundreds of farmers in IPM methods in Tamil Nadu, India.



D. Dinakaran (far right) and G. Gajendran, organizers of Farm School Radio, assist onion farmers with pheromone traps.



Mr. Srinivasan, an onion grower enrolled in Farm School Radio, holds up a small radio transmitter at the final event.

RADIOS ARE A DWINDLING PRESENCE IN AMERICAN HOMES, and the sound of static — much like the clicking of typewriters or an establishing modem connection — threatens to be erased from collective memory. But for people in developing countries, analog radio is a powerful medium for communication. Subscriptions are not required, and the cost of small, handheld receivers is low.

In India, farm programming from All India Radio (AIR) is a unique national asset. It serves a vast rural audience, many of whom depend on its daily weather, planting, and pest and disease updates. Local AIR stations employ farm radio reporters, specialists who have strong ties to the local farming community.

Because of AIR's reach and connection with farmers, scientists with the Integrated Pest Management Innovation Lab (IPM IL, formerly the IPM CRSP) and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) organized a 20-week radio series on IPM methods. Farm School Radio, as it was called by organizers, reached hundreds — and likely thousands — of farmers in Tamil Nadu on three AIR stations.

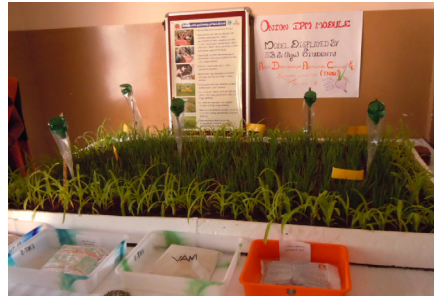
The IPM IL, managed by Virginia Tech's Office of International Research, Education, and Development and funded by USAID, promotes pest management methods that reduce damage caused by pests without harming the environment. IPM can help farmers in Tamil Nadu whose crops are affected by pests and diseases.

REACHING FAR AND WIDE

"Radio listening is common in India," Govindasamy Gajendran, professor of crop protection at TNAU and program organizer, explains.

Gajendran and fellow organizers — D. Dinakaran, S. Mohankumar, and G. Karthikeyan, all TNAU faculty — are IPM experts with the IPM IL's South Asia Regional Program. One of their successes in the region is the development of a sustainable, biointensive IPM package for onion that is widely practiced by the region's growers. ("Packages" are a holistic approach to managing a crop's pest and disease problems.) They are also regularly involved in AIR's farm programming in Tamil Nadu, where AIR stations reach 60% of the state and broadcast in the local language (Tamil).





(From left to right) The filled reception hall at the Farm School Radio final event at TNAU | TNAU students' model of IPM methods | Mrs. Malarvizhi, a grower enrolled in Farm School Radio, receives her award certificate from TNAU Vice-Chancellor P. Murugesha Boopathi and IPM IL Director Muni Muniappan.

Timely messages about farming can be relayed more quickly via radio than via other methods, like field days or trainings, that take longer to organize. Because of this, Gajendran says, "We thought that All India Radio would be a good medium for technology transfer." This collaboration with AIR was the first of its kind for the IPM IL, and the Tuesday evening series became a ritual for many farmers.

TNAU-AIR STRATEGIC PLAN

Before the broadcasts began, the IPM IL team and TNAU's Extension Education initiated recruitment efforts through AIR and local extension services. While the series was open to everyone with a radio, organizers asked for interested farmers to officially enroll. The low cost (10 rupees, or about 20 U.S. cents) was intended to be an affordable commitment, and over 1400 farmers enrolled.

Farm School Radio aired simultaneously on three AIR stations throughout Tamil Nadu over 20 weeks. Before each pre-recorded, 30-minute program, several specialists and

15–20 farmers assembled in a TNAU classroom. After a brief talk about a topic in IPM, a question and answer session followed. The farmers acted as the voices for the hundreds listening, easing any doubts farmers and those listening might have about the content, according to Gajendran.

A DAY OF CELEBRATION

At the end of the series, organizers held a final event at TNAU, which over 700 farmers from several districts of Tamil Nadu attended.

Throughout the day, exhibitions and demonstrations on IPM topics from the radio series were available for farmers. Students from TNAU's Agricultural College and Research Institute created models of miniature yellow sticky traps and pheromone traps, both successful IPM tools against pests. A book in Tamil, "IPM in Vegetable Crops," containing Farm School

A farmer held up his radio and said, "This is my university!"

Radio's content and color photos of pests and diseases, was distributed to participants free of charge. "Farmers could then do the identification themselves," Gajendran explained.

Participants received award certificates showing successful completion of Farm School Radio. Doug Pfeiffer, co-principal investigator for the IPM IL's South Asia Regional Program, was in the audience that day. "A farmer held up his radio and said, 'This is my university!'" Pfeiffer said.

Farmers have relayed feedback about the positive benefits of Farm School Radio's content. Some have completely switched over from chemical-only pest control to IPM. "They act as ambassadors of IPM in their villages," Gajendran says.

IPM IL researchers are conducting an impact assessment of the program with hopes of organizing another radio series. Until then, local listeners can still hear Gajendran and his colleagues on the occasional Wednesday or Saturday, advising on onions and okra, traps and trichoderma, and fruit flies and pheromones.

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