

Agricultural information and the farming community in Sri Lanka: with special reference to Gampaha and Kegalle Districts

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Individual seeks information 'for sheer curiosity', 'for new knowledge', 'for solving problem', 'for decision making', and 'for survival' in a meaningful way. In the context of information retrieval, the individual seeks the required knowledge from the vast store of knowledge base 'to find some kind of dynamic equilibrium in the knowledge stage'. However, individuals, their environment and their interactions always keep changing and therefore, information seeking behavior / process always might not follow any standard approach. In this back drop, what is needed is to examine the system frequently for better information organization and information retrieval.

Farming is a 'technical activities and information intensive occupation'. And it is successful and productive only when the framers are found to be 'serious, active and relatively sophisticated users of technical information' particularly in the scientific context. Sri Lanka has a developing mixed economy, largely based on agriculture, services and small scale industries. Therefore, identifying agricultural information needs of farming community in Sri Lanka is timely needed.

This study was conducted with the objectives of identifying agricultural information needs of farming community in Sri Lanka and their characteristics and economic background. This study utilized a survey method to reveal the conception of agricultural information need held by farmers.

The study was conducted at the two districts namely Gampaha and Kegalle. The data for the study was gathered from a selected sample of 200 farmers through questionnaire and interview methods.

Findings reveal that the participation of younger group for farming is less. On the basis of farmers experiences and responses gained thoroughly interview, it is understood that the information related to the latest development in the field is remained considerably unknown and beyond reach of the farmers because of poor acquisition, storage, retrieval and dissemination mechanism of the library system in the districts. It was found that the spread of libraries in researched areas is not up to the standard. It was identified that there is a poor relationship between farmers and agriculture officers.

To develop and improve the system of collection, organization and dissemination of information, the Department of Agriculture must reorganize its own library system with modern information processing equipments and well-trained staff. This system should be extended to all officers of the departments at district and village level. Since library is a part of the larger institution, the higher authorities of the parent body should recognize the value of Agricultural library and Information Network as a significant element in the process. For the growth of agriculture, the government should extend its whole support for the development of the agricultural library system in Sri Lanka. Stakeholders of the system like the government, Agricultural Ministry etc. should work cooperatively in order to develop and utilize Agricultural Library for delivering effective and efficient information service for the farming community.

Key words: Agricultural information, Farming community, information needs, library, Information retrieval

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