Notes on Visit to Coimbatore and Chennai

Dates: 28-31 May 2015

Upon arrival in Coimbatore, held an interaction with the Registrar of TN Agricultural University, Heads of departments of Planning & Monitoring, Extension Education, Crop Management, Horticulture, Research, Plant Breeding & Genetics, Environment Science, Fodder Crops, and Farm Management. Later, I also interacted with the Dr Ramasamy, Vice Chancellor who returned late that night from Chennai and on the next day with Dr K Palanisamy, Consultant, IWMI, Hyderabad and the Professor in Microbiology. The focus of the interaction with HODs was on how an institutional relationship could be established by the North Eastern Agricultural Institutions and Colleges with the TNAU, the oldest and perhaps the largest in the country and a pioneer in several areas with sole expertise in neglected areas such as fodder and forage crops development. Many of these hybrids were already in use in the North East such as irrigated fodder CO-4 for which CO-5 had also been developed in an exclusive Department of Forage Crops which has also developed Fodder Sorghum CO31, and Lucerne CO2. The University has 10 Agricultural Colleges in various districts which have separate Agricultural and Horticultural wings in some of them and are assisted by 36 Agricultural Research Stations and with one KVK in every district except Chennai and Ooty. This strong institutional set-up compensates for the poor levels of extension after the decline of the Training & Visit Programme initiated long back at the instance of the Ford Foundation in the sixties. The University is attempting to link up with the ATMA farmers' group although with no measurable success. A greater effect is seen with the promotion of Producers' Societies, Farmer groups for agroforestry, horticulture, etc. The University also has an Integrated Farming Group which employs Veterinarians (Animal Husbandry), a remainder of the time when the Tamil Nadu University for Veterinary & Animal Sciences (TANUVAS) was separated from this mother institute to form a separate and pioneer institute of its kind in the country.

Following the discussions, visited the units and demonstrations for turkey and Japanese quail integrated farms with ponds in ten cents (about 0.025 ha) that could be replicated in the proposed MOF programme for self-sustaining models with commercial possibilities. Also saw the vermicompost and FYM units, the latter was mentioned in Mizoram of particular interest. The horticultural show organised for displaying hybrids and other new developments included a grafted brinjal on a root stock of a common, hardy plant species which enabled increased productivity. The University has improved their web portal – TNAU Agritech to enable farmers to access information on a variety of areas that the University's teams are working on. The bilingual service provides market information, an expert system for crop aned animal husbandry enterprises, weather forecast using the University's automatic weather stations, forecast information on crop pes & disease, on Government schemes, loans and crop insurance, community radio discourses, video modules on various technologies, and success stories. The University has biannual meetings with all its wings across the State to exchange experiences and to share developments and attributes its effectiveness to this mutual interaction. The Vice Chancellor said that they had interacted with some States in the North East earlier and enrolled some students and would be quite happy to institutionalise this interaction in specific directions that could benefit the NER. The Microbiology division has developed and markets small packets of bioenzymes for effective

reduction of Farm yard manure and said that this was popular among farmers. The vast range of activities of the University suggests that for the North Eastern Region, a similar approach strongly linking the State Colleges to the regional University with several departments specialising in different areas of agricultural development relevant to the North East and in turn linked to Agricultural Research Stations could greatly improve the ability of the farmers in the NER to convert potential into reality. Naturally, such a research system should have a strong extension linkage to relate research in labs to the needs of the land.

Discussed with Dr Thilagar, Vice Chancellor of TANUVAS on the work done by them in breed improvement and stabilisation. He made a significant remark that the National Research Centres such as for Pig, Yak, etc were intended for research and were not suitable vehicles for Animal Husbandry extension. On the poor level of piglets per farrow that I had noticed and remarked during my visit to Mizoram, he expressed surprise and said that the actual success rate for liquid insemination should be ascertained as the process of handling the sow for AI would induce anxiety and increased adrenaline flow which may reduce the success rate. On the issue of training village level workers for AI, he was of the view that the veterinarians tended to treat this as a specialty which it was not. However, in the case of pig, at the initial stages, Vets need to supervise the process in a scientific manner and establish some handling protocols to ensure best results. Further, attention had to be paid to the decrease in motility of liquid semen in transfer from Semen Station to village including for the diluent used for producing a large number of straws. Similarly, for chicken, he suggested that vets should supervise the hatcheries for best hatching results. For herd improvement as currently under discussion in DoNER for pig, goat, sheep, etc, he was of the view that this was an activity classed under Animal Husbandry which was neglected by Vets who preferred to believe that as doctors, they had only to vaccinate and treat diseased animals. A proper AH extension system was an absolute necessity. The University had set up one Research Centre in each district in the State and was trying to closely interact with farmers on such matters.

This discussion highlights the institutional vacuum currently in the NER for a Veterinary and Animal Husbandry research cum extension system with linkages in each State and to the districts beyond. During the discussion, he also recalled the time when he was in Nilgiris district in 1983 (when I was in Erode district) and the effectiveness of the Milk Union's veterinary and animal husbandry support in contrast to the dependence on the AH department in Tamil Nadu which had failed to meet farmer needs in this area. He mentioned that the old system was likely to be revived now which meant that the District Milk Union would meet farmer needs for AH and Veterinary support at its own cost. My experience in Erode district from that time was that a doctor who visited a member's animal shed could not refuse to look at a goat belonging to the member on the plea that it was not a milch animal. By the same token, any animal husbandry programme in the NER should integrate such veterinary and animal husbandry support and link with universities or colleges for latest scientific knowledge on breeding, AH practices, treatment, etc. The cost aspects need to be worked out and perhaps supported at the initial stages as was done in the Operation Flood programme.

31st May 2015

R. Vijaykumar
Secretary, DoNER