

Appendix D
Technical Liaison and Support Staff in Extension

(This section prepared by J.B. Claar, INTERPAKS,
University of Illinois)

An adequate, effective corps of Technical Liaison and Support Personnel is essential. Extension must be able to reach out to all knowledge sources to acquire inputs. And extension, to the extent necessary, must have the internal capability to acquire and help adapt technology for use by its clients. Farming Systems Research projects which emphasize testing and demonstrations can make extension's job easier in this regard. In order to take advantage of this opportunity, technical liaison, as contrasted with administrative liaison, is essential, including liaison on research projects. Extension can help in fact, needs to help in its own self interest with field aspects of research, from identifying problems to testing technology. Research and extension have a vested interest in each other. Neither can accomplish its task without the other, and both need to set up liaison mechanisms for the other to plug into. Therefore, research and extension services need to remember that solving the research-extension gap requires transactions—each giving as well as receiving (Claar and Watts 1984).

Extension and research share the technology innovation continuum and when the pressure for results is on, it is easy to suggest that the other end of the continuum has failed. Too, the two organizations may be competing for scarce dollars with great pressure on each to assure its independent identity. However, the more general problem seems to be that countries may not appreciate the whole continuum, thus leaving the sum of the functions poorly attended.

It should be easy to sell these two organizations, each in its own self interest, to help each other do its job. Recognition of mutual interest is the starting point and an essential condition for successful linkage. Projects should be designed to make such self-interest obvious and liaison and support not only expected but easy. Support in extension has two meanings in this context. Support for research by involvement in all aspects of farmers' contact for research projects. But as significant as this is, the need for support of field staff within extension is equally critical to performance. In fact, such Technical Liaison and Support Staff (sometimes called extension specialists) are at one time a primary source of content, training, backstopping, and quality control.

It may not be an overstatement to say that many countries discovered the importance of field extension and implemented it without an equally firm understanding of the parallel need for support. Whatever the reason, it now seems time to correct the imbalance where it exists and to develop a complete extension system with the capacity to place greater emphasis on content.