

A. The Farmer's Perspective

Farmers are the essential actors in agricultural development. They are the ones who will increase production, safeguard the nation's agricultural resources, and improve the levels of living. The central purpose of the R/E System, as it is of all other government programs in all countries, is to support the farmers in their critical role.

Since farmers operate under the constraints imposed by the ecology and the macro-environment, national goals and policy objectives need to be translated into farmer goals. Constraints under which they operate are so overwhelming, so powerful, that farmers cannot react to national goals that are inconsistent with those constraints. In most cases national goals can be translated into farmer goals and can accommodate farmer constraints.

FSR/E provides methodologies for understanding the farmer's constraints and how he deals with them. This understanding, in turn, leads to improving research which provides technology more relevant to needs. While there is variation in FSR/E methodologies, they all involve knowing and understanding the farmer and testing technology in the farming system by criteria of that system. FSR/E also requires a rapport with the farmer, based not only on empathy and appreciation of constraints, but also on respect for farmer knowledge and ability as a manager and on an interest in the farm family welfare. Experience to date indicates that FSR/E is an effective instrument for building empathy, respect, and interest--and for improving morale of R/E personnel.

The importance of the farmer perspective leads to an explicit meaning of the term "innovation" in this handbook. Innovation is defined as farmer utilization on a significant scale. The simple existence of an improved technology does not constitute innovation, and the technology innovation process is not complete until there is significant utilization.

The farming system is a production system. It is also a social system which exists in a larger political-geographic-economic-cultural system. No national R/E System has the capacity to address all system aspects of a farming system. It is essential, however, (1) to be able to identify some few critical interactions with which the farmer must deal and (2) to obey certain constraints imposed by the market, infrastructure, national policy, and culture.

R/E cannot deal with all problems of all farmers. It will have to make a conscious choice of clientele, of commodity or problem, and of geographic area. FSR/E can provide input for the choice, but some choice criteria are outside FSR/E.