B. Farmer Participation

Since farmers, as producers and farming systems managers, are the key elements in national production, it is important that they participate in the R/E process. Farmers can be thought of as firm managers and the R/E system as a multi-firm R&D department. Farmers are, of course, the major participants in adoption, and the earlier in the innovation process they can begin to participate, the more effective the process will be.

There is a wide variety of channels for farmer involvement. These include interviews and surveys; on-farm trials in which farmers take an active role in implementation; discussion with farmers on trials to conduct and on trial performance; researcher observation of farming operations; participation of farmers in interpreting results of on-farm trials; participation of farmers in designing extension demonstrations and interpreting them, and others.

Farmers can be involved as members of research and extension committees and can take part in formal research and extension planning. However, they do not have to be formally integrated into the process in order to be "involved." They do have to have input into these activities, and FSR/E provides for a systematic way of getting the input. Seeking farmer input and dealing with it helps achieve rapport with the farmer.

Farmers are experimental by nature, and in a group of farmers there are almost always some who are searching on their own for better technology. Farmers seldom adopt a new technology on the word of R/E personnel. They almost always either try it out in their own systems or observe its performance in a similar system. One the strength of the extension demonstration is that it facilitates the farmer's own experimental process. FSR/E builds on this experimental nature of farmers to get farmer involvement. Farmers will be involved, either on their own or in collaboration with research and extension personnel. FSR/E achieves the collaboration.

While farmers are involved as individuals, it is important to think of them as representatives of key farming systems. The economics of R/E require a considerable degree of similarity among key farming system characteristics so that an improved technology can be applied to a relatively large production area.