

SPIC in the Service of Farmers

By showing strong commitment in its every endeavour to enhance the livelihood of the farmers and the rural community over the past 35 years, SPIC has won a unique position and is now woven with the lives of the farming fraternity inseparably by way of offering quality products with innovative, inimitable package of services customized to the needs of the farmers. Keeping pace with the changing needs of the farmers SPIC has been constantly redefining its stance to be consumer-focused. In line with emerging trends, SPIC periodically enhanced its range and quality of services offered to the farmers. However, as success is hailed more a journey than a destination, never resting on its past glories, SPIC, by all means attempts to serve better and ever be an organisation revolving around its ultimate customers, the farmers.

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THE WORLD HAS WITNESSED. OVER THE decades, India's resurgence from a distressed importer of foodgrains into an exporter of food grains besides turning self-sufficient in feeding her billion-strong population. Undoubtedly, the impressive success of green revolution was possible owing to the incontrovertible contribution from the fertiliser industry. This is established by the fact that when the fertiliser consumption rose from less than a kg/hectare in 1950-51 to 90 kg/hectare in 2003-04, foodgrain production also increased correspondingly from an abysmal 52 million tonnes to a whopping 212 million tonnes during this period.

Fertiliser industry has always exhibited several intriguing characteristics of its own kind. Being subjected to stringent quality norms, legislations and licensing requirements on production, packaging, storage, distribution, and marketing, innovations in product and non-product fronts have been comparatively slower and fewer than other industries. Distribution controls prevent a manufacturer from selling his products anywhere in the country beyond the allotted territories. No brand is accepted unanimously across the country due to a geographically, socio-economically and culturally diverse farming population that paves the way for regional dominance or leadership.

SUPPORTING SERVICES

DESPITE BEING KNOWN PRIMARILY AS a commoditised industry, there are

evidences of concerted brand building by many organisations in their region or territories concerned. There are attempts to create value and earn equity for their brands by way of offering supportive services to the ultimate customers - the farmers, besides their products. Realising the emerging Consumerism in the industry, betting on the emotional platform, organisations started extending these kinds of services to win the farmer's priced loyalty, which translates into positive image, valuable equity for the brand, enhanced sales volume and ultimately, the market leadership.

Earlier, when a farmer was left with limited choices, this task was presumably easy for the organisations to win his share of heart and mind. Surprisingly, the turf is now changing. Thanks to the recent technological revolutions in the country for making an ordinary farmer grow intellectually and empowered to make individualistic decisions that are insulated from external influences. With more and more choices to choose from, it is undeniably a hard play for the brands in fray to win his priced loyalty. Hence, a quality product at an affordable price bundled with a package of innovative, unique value-added services could alone win organizations a sustainable competitive edge over others.

By and large, these services include soil testing, consultancy, trainings, demonstrations and/or campaigns on improved farming practices, agro-service centres and the like. In harmony with the novelty, utility, and relevance of

the services, farmers demonstrate, in turn, enduring loyalty towards such organisations and the brands that offer these services. The range and relevance of the services are the key differentiators that make a brand lead or lag in a market. Hence, the gamut of the services offered is fast expanding as every organisation strives to get an edge over others.

However, in a controlled industry like fertilisers, market share estimates based on the volumes sold in a territory seldom reflect the true anatomy of the market. Since the industry is subjected to several controls, in this context, on distribution, which prevent a manufacturer taking his product beyond his designated territory, this fact assumes great importance to all the players. Hence, the leadership position must necessarily be assessed by keeping in mind other means such as strong loyalty exhibited by the customers and the channel partners. Owing to its sustained interest and investment in bringing out innovative CRM measures, SPIC has become a household name inseparably woven in the lives of the farmers with a strong sense of affinity, attachment, and loyalty.

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF SERVICE ACTIVITIES

HAVING REALISED THE INDISPENSABILITY of farm sector that provides livelihood to almost 60-65% of the nation's population, SPIC has been constantly advocating the farming community, improved farming technologies for development. As majority of the rural masses practise farming as

their main occupation, integrated **development** both in farm and non-farm **sectors assumes** paramount importance for the balanced **growth** of the nation's **economy**.

With the vision of enhancing the socio-economic status of not only **farmers** but **also** the entire rural population, **SPIC** has been organising various welfare schemes during the last three decades, since its inception.

SPIC's decades old pedigree **starts** from the days when farmers were unaware of inorganic fertilisers in the 70's. Joining with the national mission to revolutionize the hitherto traditional agriculture, **SPIC** undertook several initiatives to promote use of chemical fertilisers. With unstinted devotion and appropriate support in the form of personalised attention and consultancy, **SPIC** has been able to establish itself strongly and create a pull for the brand from the farmers. To manage the entire spectrum of service **activities** more effectively, the erstwhile Market Development Wing was transformed into an empowered Customer Service Cell since 2001.

Since seventies **SPIC** joined hands with the department of agriculture with the objective of creating awareness on advanced cultivation techniques that result in increased yield and ultimately, profitability. The array of services offered is as follows:

for the farmers

- ◆ Regional level trainings and meets
- ◆ Extension programmes
- ◆ Farm journal
- ◆ Services through inputs diagnostic centre, **Tambaram**
- ◆ Programmes with AIR
- ◆ Agro-service centres
- ◆ Village adoption programme
- ◆ Programmes through rural development centre, **Tambaram**

For the rural community

- ◆ **Primary** health centres
- ◆ Promoting rural sports
- ◆ Aids for rural education
- ◆ Rural festivals / **cultural** programmes

PROGRAMMES FOR FARMERS

Regional-level Trainings and Meets

In a novel gesture of transferring knowledge on advanced technologies in agriculture and allied enterprises, trainings, seminars, and meets are **organised** for the **benefit** of the farmers. Usually, about 75-80 such trainings are organized across the country in a year and thousands of innovative farmers participate in the trainings to get their skills honed.

During the farmers meets, organized on themes such as commercial farming, alternative and high-profit crops, **export-oriented** agriculture, experts **from** the State Agricultural Universities (**SAUs**) and Research Stations share their wisdom and several successful farmers share their experience to motivate the participants. It is an occasion wherein ideas flow back and forth and get enriched. During the meets, innovative farmers are awarded for their outstanding performance in their chosen crops to motivate fellow farmers to aim for and achieve the feat.

Extension Programmes

Although fertiliser consumption has a direct impact on food production, balanced application of nutrients along with integrated farming practices becomes important to prevent deterioration of precious soil and to sustain our food security in the years to come. As such distortion in the use of plant nutrients will lead to nutritional imbalance

ultimately affecting the soil fertility and productivity. **SPIC** is advocating through various programmes like the individual **farmer** contact programme, village level meetings, seminars, demonstrations workshops, etc., to promote awareness amongst farmers on the concepts of balanced nutrition and integrated nutrient management.

Individual Farmers Contact Programme

Trained personnel, in the role of service providers, are deployed to reach out to and interact with the farmers in their fields and provide them with first hand information on latest techniques and inputs available, thereby offering a customised service for their immediate requirements.

Demonstrations and Exhibitions

In line with the fact that seeing is believing, spot demonstrations on efficient use of agri-inputs and technology are organised in the farmers' fields thereby providing an opportunity to understand the real benefits of the recommendations, and confidently follow the practice as it suits their local conditions.

Exhibition stalls are put up displaying the latest arrivals in the markets and attempt to give leads and kindle interest among the visitors to look for more information on the topics of attraction. **SPIC** participated in the fairs/exhibitions organized by Department of Agriculture, **ICAR**, and industry bodies such as **AICCI** and won



Trainings and meets



Exhibition stalls

awards and accolades. During the Regional level farmers meets, SPIC organizes exhibitions and brings together many corporates and farmers forums for the benefit of the participants.

Crop Seminars and Workshops

Pre-season seminars on cultivation practices of the ensuing crop help the farmers to improve their practices to maximize yield and profit.

Technical experts from research stations, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK) and State Agriculture Universities are invited to share their knowledge with the participants.

Village-level Meeting and Audio-Visual Screenings

Successful farmers from the village and technical experts address a small gathering of farmers and discuss on issues relevant to the period and their territory. Such meetings help organise collective efforts and sharing of knowledge on integrated plant protection, water conservation, etc.

Farm Journal - SPIC Pannai Cheithi Malar

Striving to make information on the latest scientific developments in agriculture available at the doorsteps of the farmers to practice farming as a viable and profitable venture, a farm journal in Tamil is introduced in 1987. "SPIC Farm News Journal - SPIC Pannai Cheithi Malar" has been disseminating the above information since its inception. Focusing on hi-tech agriculture and alternative high-

income crops, the bi-monthly magazine is hailed as a treasure of knowledge and a cache of wisdom by its 10000-strong subscriber base including agricultural consultants and academicians.

Every year an interface workshop brings together the subject matter experts, entrepreneurs, and farmers to share their ideas, findings, and experiences. Commemorating the event, a souvenir, covering (he technical inputs and the proceeding!, of the meet is also released.

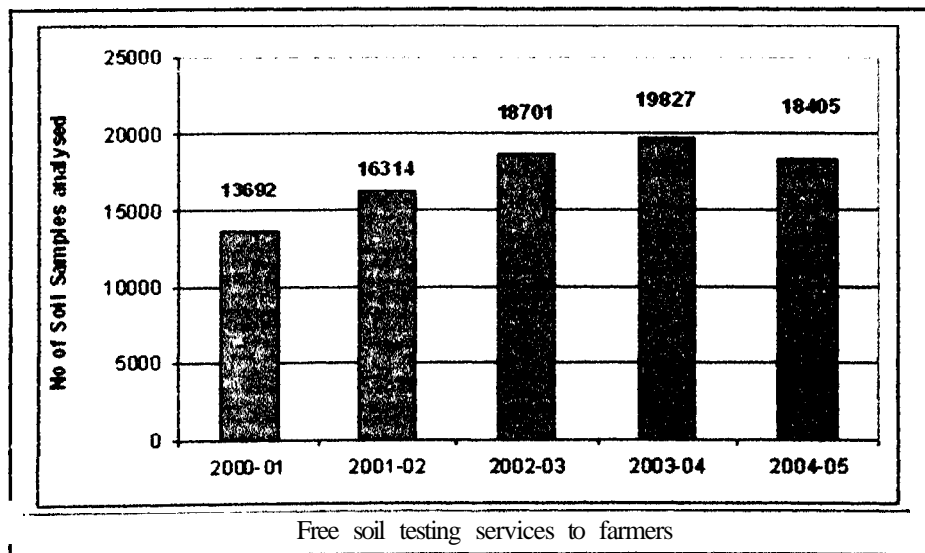
The Workshop has become a virtual springboard for many young farmers to take up market-oriented agriculture for maximising their farm income. The journal has also played a catalytic role in promoting cooperative farming through organised vegetable and fruit growers clubs and animal husbandry, poultry, goat rearing and the like.

Input Diagnostic Centre (IDC)

A modern agricultural input diagnostic laboratory was established in 1979 at Tuticorin; later got shifted to Trichy and to its present premises at Tambaram in 1995. The laboratory features advanced facilities to analyze the quality and suitability of various agri-inputs like soil, seeds, fertilisers (both organic and inorganic), and irrigation water. Principal services offered by the centre are:

- ◆ Free soil testing service to the farmers
- ◆ Diagnosis of soil/plant/irrigation water deficiencies and offering suitable advisory services.
- ◆ Quality parameter assessment of leaf and compost.
- ◆ Soil fertility mapping and land use advisory services.
- ◆ Farm consultancy services.
- ◆ Mobile soil testing services through soil test instruments mounted in a van.
- ◆ Soil reclamation programmes.

Soil Samples analysed through IDC till date (in Numbers)			
Free analysis of soil samples in lab	Free soil test through mobile van	Micro-nutrient analysis	Irrigation water samples
1,36,887	36,106	1,891	2,089



Mobile Soil Testing Van

The service is offered through a vehicle mounted with soil test instruments to visit the farmers' fields, collect, analyze and explain the farmers significance of the results.. Approximately 4500 samples are analysed every year.

Reclaiming Hopes along with the Alkaline Lands

As a part of the services of IDC, identifying saline, alkaline soils and taking up reclamation projects to revive hopes along with the vicious problems of the soil to make it amenable for cultivation. One of such projects taken up recently is in a village near Chennai, called ARAPEDU where the farmers have been demonstrated the reclamation practices required for making their soil productive.

Arappedu is a small village near Chennai with pH of soils ranging from 8.7 to 9.2. Water from nearby wells of the area had also become saline due to the excessive alkalinity of soil.

Having charted out the reclamation procedures and explained the farmers about the necessity and benefits. SPIC agreed to supply gypsum for the reclamation project at free of cost.

Blessed with a good spell of rain, adding gypsum and impounding and draining water was started for removing the excess sodium salts present in the soil. After repeating the process, green leaf manure was applied and the farmers started cultivating of paddy and groundnut crops according to their choice. To their surprise, the crop growth was excellent



Reclamation project

and the yields were beyond the expectation of the farmers. Presently there are more than 10 such projects running across the country and the success story keeps getting repeated.

Programmes with All India Radio

A 52-week programme in All India Radio, Tamil Nadu, with a weekly 30-minute broadcast on Commercial Agriculture and related subjects went on air last year. With overwhelming response from the farmers, it was extended to 13 more weeks. Successful farmers and technocrats were interviewed; their experiences and recommendations were presented to the farmers. First ever direct phone-in programme for agriculture at AIR, Chennai, was organised to help the farmers get live and instant answers to their queries.

Agro Service Centres

The concept of establishing Agro Service Centres (ASC) was evolved during 1987-88, with the prime objective of improving the socio-economic status of the farmers. These centres cater to the requirements of 10-12 villages located within a radius of 10-15 kilometres from the main central village. The centre, managed by a qualified technical officer, has all the necessary infrastructure facilities provided to the farmers through a franchise agent who maintains such facilities. Under one roof, all agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilisers, agrochemicals, soil-ameliorants are made available to the farmers at discounted prices. Each centre is provided with a tractor and other farm implements, extended at concessional cost to the farmers of neighbouring villages.

Agricultural development programmes like crop seminars, demonstrations, soil testing campaigns, seed treatment campaigns, etc.. are conducted under the aegis of these centres. Rural development programmes such as animal husbandry, general hygiene programmes and medical camps are also conducted. These programmes are effectively implemented with faculties from various research stations/universities and state departments of agriculture.

For over two decades, SPIC agro-service centres have contributed to the growth of agriculture in the rural areas they cater to. With changes in the farmers' needs and their increasing acceptance of modern agricultural methods and inputs, the cluster approach employed by SPIC metamorphosed into an approach set to serve a larger geographical area. This is the SPIC district rural development programme. In addition to planning and conducting its own rural development programmes, SPIC also collaborates with the government of India and some nationalised banks playing a catalytic role for securing a greater penetration and effectiveness for their integrated rural development programme and agricultural development schemes. Details of agro-service centres operated by SPIC are presented below:

State	No. of ASCs	No. of villages
Tamil Nadu	56	560
Karnataka	5	50
Andhra Pradesh	4	40

A unique insurance scheme for the farmers in association with Oriental Insurance Company was introduced for the areas catered by the ASCs. The "SPIC Oriental Farmers Insurance Scheme (SOFIS)", which provided coverage for personal accident, pumpsets, motors, bullock carts, tractors and other farm implements, was well received by the farmers. Under the ASC programme, we have also taken efforts to improve socio-economic status of physically handicapped and destitute citizens of our country.

The agro-service centre at Melmaruvathur (Tamil Nadu) guided the farmers to form small groups based on their skills and opportunities available. Each group, consisting of 20-25 members, took up commercial ventures like goat rearing, diary farming, vegetables cultivation, and marketing, etc. Reclaiming problematic soils in Arapedu was one of the successful projects implemented by this ASC.

Village Adoption Programme

During early **seventies**, underdeveloped villages around the Tuticorin fertiliser plant **were** identified and brought under the programme, comprehensive coverage of the basic needs of the villagers like providing drinking water, arranging health **camps**, improving educational facilities, etc. were focussed.

Rural Development Centre, Tambaram

With the prime objective of offering **high-quality, customised** training, a Rural Development Centre is established in 1989. Equipped with necessary amenities including a model farm with a dairy, a poultry unit, and a goat farm, this center caters to motivate and instill confidence in young and educated farmers to pursue farming as a challenging and profitable business enterprise. Visiting technical experts are invited from agricultural and veterinary universities, research stations and other reputed institutions. Alumni of this centre, successful farmers and a bunch of entrepreneurs in fish farms, rabbit rearing units, poultry farms and commercial vegetable cultivation share their experience with the participants.



Rural development centre

Similar training programmes are organized in Karnataka and Andhra **Pradesh** also **utilizing** faculty and facilities available at the agricultural **universities/research** institutions of the states.

Training in allied enterprises such as producing value added milk products, (**paneer**, cheese, milk goa etc.), exclusive programmes for women self help **groups** are being organised in large numbers every year.

Thousands of women entrepreneurs get trained in preparation of products like phenyl, detergent powder and ready-made masala products, jams, etc., and enhanced the earning potential of their farm family.

Beyond its well-quipped campus, outreach programmes are organised by KDC at villages in their own environment and based on the requirements of the farmers of the local area. The centre, since its inception, imparted training to more than 20,000 farmers under 12 different programmes.

Fostering Farmers' Groups

Under the catalytic initiatives of RDC, innovative farmers with scientific bent and business acumen joined hands and formed groups in their territories and started practicing hitherto traditional agriculture as a profitable agri-business venture. Through collectively marketing their produce, they gain great bargaining power, avoid middlemen and realise better price. There are several examples, viz., the one at Kottiyal of Perambalur district formed by farmers growing vegetables and horticultural crops; at Sandavasal and Thunayankuppam of Tiruvannamalai district by banana and vegetables growing farmers; at Ottakoil of Kanchipuram district and the list is growing. These farmers who got trained at RDC are taking forward this initiative as a movement across the country through participating in farmers meetings and sharing their success stories with the fellow farmers.

RURAL WELFARE PROGRAMMES

Primary Health Centres

Envisioning a disease-free India, SPIC

has been maintaining primary health centres in remote villages. **These** centres are equipped with modern medical equipments and manned with experienced medical **professionals**. The primary health centres currently in operation are at Chinna **Vadagudipatti**, **Soorakkudi**, **Namanasamudram**, **Nemam**, Ilyathankudi and Theeyathur villages in Tamil Nadu. SPIC meets out the cost of establishing and maintaining the centres.



Primary health centre

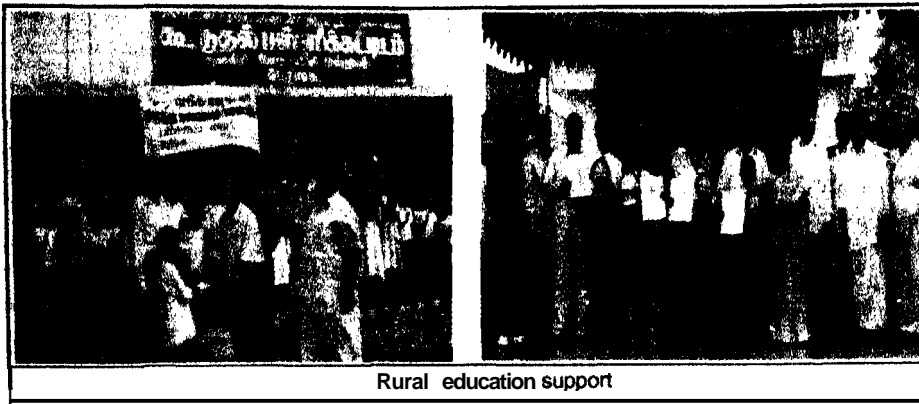
General health campaigns and eye care **camps** are also organised for the rural community to promote awareness on hygiene and health care measures; vaccination campaigns are arranged to prevent epidemics. These centers offer the rural masses multi and super specialty medical services, which are otherwise beyond their reach. Promoting nutrition, sanitation and health education to the children, these centers are on the mission of transforming rural India.

Rural Sports

To exhibit the talents of rural youth and children in sports, SPIC is organising various sports tournaments and distributing sports kits in the rural areas.



Rural sports



Rural education support

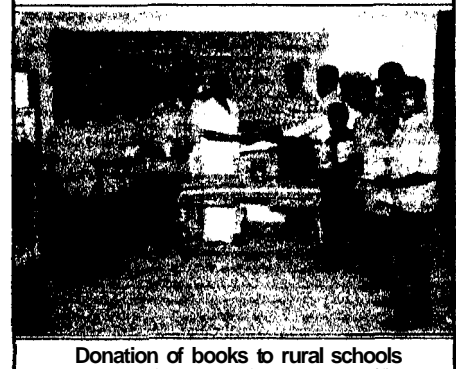
Cricket, *kabadi* tournaments, cycle and cart rallies are conducted to promote sports and health awareness among rural public.

Rural Educational Support

To motivate the rural school children to perform better, merit awards are being instituted for the best performers. Stationery aids such as wrappers, pencils, and scales are distributed to rural, poor and under-privileged children. Rural schools are donated with utensils such as water drums, etc. Tree planting in the school premises is also taken up to promote awareness among children on afforestation. Library books are donated to rural schools for creating awareness among the student community in reading



Agricultural library



Donation of books to rural schools

books on varied subjects to enrich and broaden their spectrum of knowledge beyond the textbooks.

Reading Rooms

Reading rooms are opened at hamlets with an educated, unemployed youth serving as a tutor. Since its inception, the initiative gained momentum and already more than 10 such reading rooms are in operation with service-minded teachers providing academic support to the under-privileged rural students.

Rural Festivals/ Cultural Programmes

Presenting vital information with the flavour of entertainment, street plays like Therukoothu and Villupattu in Tamil Nadu, Burrakadha in Andhra are organised. Dramas, karagattam and other folklores are also organized. Further, renovation of passenger bus shelters and erection of information boards on bus timings are taken up in rural areas. SPIC distributes food and water packets during festival times and provides information boards to rural temples.

A snapshot of the services offered to farmers and rural public is presented in Table 1.

FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

IN ITS FOCUSED EFFORT TOWARDS BUILDING a strong relationship with the farmers and dealers, SPIC is in the process of conceiving several new programmes. Some of the following programmes were launched last year :

SPIC Ambassadors

With the objective of recognising the ingenuity of the rural intellects and synergising their and SPIC's efforts for

enhancing the livelihood of the rural population, an innovative idea of SPIC Ambassadors, based on the concept of opinion leadership emerged and put into practice since last year. The Ambassadors serve as the vital link between SPIC and the rural fraternity.

Honouring those prominent personalities who derive satisfaction in serving the rural community or are potential change-agents, SPIC joins hands with them to work towards the noble cause of development. Through constant encouragement, SPIC supports these micro-level leaders in disseminating improved technologies, creating awareness on critical social issues.

The SPIC Ambassador may be a / an

- ◆ Progressive farmer,
- ◆ Agri-input dealer,
- ◆ Local leader (panchayat/ other local administration),
- ◆ Leader of SHG's,
- ◆ Entrepreneur,
- ◆ Child prodigy (academics/other skills),
- ◆ Theatre artist (traditional arts),
- ◆ Social (rural) worker/scientist/member of NGO's,
- ◆ Achiever (innovator /sports person/ challenged),
- ◆ Teacher,
- † Person of accomplishments / achievements in rural/farming activities.

These micro-level leaders evolve themselves naturally in the social system and influence greatly the society around them. As they serve as source of reference for their domain of knowledge, for example, a teacher shall be consulted for educational opportunities, a local trader for prices and markets for commodities or a welfare activist to offer solutions for burning social issues, their technical knowledge and expertise in their domain, communication and leadership skills have to be enhanced for augmenting well in their area of influence.

Recognising this opportunity, SPIC is planning to offer skills enhancement

Table 1 - Summary of SPIC rural development activities

Programmes for farmers			
Programme	Location	Description	Benefits
Regional level training and meets	All India	Hands on training on improved agricultural practices, Rendezvous with successful farmers and technical experts	Sharing of knowledge and motivation from the peer group
Extension programmes	All India	Extension education through individual contact, village meetings seminars, demonstrations	Adoption of improved agro techniques, judicious use of inputs Higher yield and profit
Farm journal	Tamil Nadu	Bi-monthly 10000 copies	Information on new technology, experience sharing, Commercial farming, Annual meets
Input diagnostic centre	South India	No. per annum Soil test in lab - 19000 Soil test mobile van - 5000 Micronutrient test - 100 Irrigation water test-500	Free soil testing for N,P,K, Micronutrient analysis, Water analysis, Farm consultancy, Land reclamation projects
Agro-service centre	Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh	56 centres 560 farmers 5 centres 50 farmers 4 centres 40 farmers Period - 4 years	Farming techniques Livestock management, General health. Inputs distribution. Rent farm machinery - tractors
Rural welfare programmes			
Rural development centre, Tambaram	Tamil Nadu, Karnataka	Training on farming and related areas. 30 programmes/year. 5 Outreach programmes, 5 programmes for women	Commercial agriculture Mixed farming. Agro industry. Cottage industry for women
Rural sports	All India	Rural cricket. Kabadi tournament	Encouraging rural sports. Health awareness
Primary health centre	Tamil Nadu	Five villages	Fully equipped medical centres for serving the rural poor
Rural education	Tamil Nadu	Five centres	Reading rooms and educational aids for rural, under-privileged children
Rural festivals/cultural programmes	All India	Street plays religious festivals	Entertaining and communicating vital information

workshops, seminars, interactions with subject matter experts and also training programmes tailor-made to their needs. Owing to their natural affinity to serve as nodal points for exchange of ideas, messages that reach these points, usually percolate into the minds of the communities around them effectively with high degree of credibility and reciprocation. In this way, SPIC believes that this concept of micro-level rural change-agents would serve better in reaching the much-desired goal of a

developed rural India. Nurturing the Ambassadors, SPIC envisages transforming this group into a movement that holds the magic key of rural prosperity through cooperation and synergy.

Soil Health Scheme - Mann Vala Padhukaappu Thittam

Soil is the foundation of prosperity that has to be given due care to keep up its health to sustain productivity of crops grown on. This, perhaps, is the much-worried cause for the lacklustre

performance of Indian agriculture sector, even though we hold top positions globally in production of several crops such as banana and mango.

One of the main reasons attributed to the plight of ailing Indian agri sector, is the abysmally poor productivity of crops that is one among the lowest worldwide. Unless productivity of crops is improved, Indian agriculture has no bright future. As an average Indian farmer, unaware of this fact, seldom cares about maintaining health of soils and indiscriminate use of inputs result in loss of time, efforts and money thus leading to poor yield, productivity and profitability.

Aiming to bring out a sea change in the mindset of farmers to appreciate soil as a prime foundation for their livelihood, the soil health scheme was introduced last year. It proposes to inculcate scientific approach to farming and judicious use of inputs such as manures, fertilisers, and plant protection chemicals in strict compliance to scrupulous soil test based recommendations.

The scheme, a boon for the average farmer with an inquisitive mind, aptitude for scientific agriculture and importantly, mounds of concern for the foundation of his livelihood, "Soil". By enrolling as a member, the farmer can avail free preliminary testing of soil such as physical, chemical properties, textural classification, organic matter and macro nutrients (NPK) content for five years and one time analysis of other nutrients such as sulphur, calcium, magnesium, and micronutrients such as zinc, manganese, iron and copper.

The member farmers obtain consultancy on problems related to farming and on every Monday, direct telephone queries are being taken up for the members. Besides, the members are offered training on subjects of their interest four days at our rural development centre, Tambaram.

With an overwhelming response from the farming community as reflected in terms of enrollments, the scheme is expected to loom large in our portfolio of services offered to the farmers. ●