

Farmer Interest Groups (FIG): A Strategy for inclusive Agricultural Development

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Indian farmers continue to face difficulties in obtaining better prices. They are unable to determine their own food prices. The Indian agriculture sector has made significant strides in the past few decades by meeting the required production of basic staples like rice and wheat to feed the growing population. However, farmers cannot realize the correct value for their produce and achieve their full potential in terms of yield. The subdivision and fragmentation of landholdings, lack of awareness and less inclination towards adopting newer technologies have led to lower production levels against the optimal potential. The lack of adequate marketing infrastructure, a long chain of intermediaries, and a lack of collectivization effort have led to fewer marketing opportunities and reduced profits for the farmers.

1. Problems of Indian farmers

- The decline in per income from the majority of crops and enterprises due to increased cost of production
- Fragmentation of land holding
- Volatile price
- Non -availability and labour wages.
- Non-availability of supply of credit and agricultural inputs
- Dependency on intermediaries (Money lenders, salesman)
- Lack of assured income due to price variation and climate change

To provide farmers the confidence to determine their own pricing for their produce, establishment of farmer federations, commodity groups, and farmer interest organizations is essential. A Farmer Interest Group (FIG) is an autonomous group of farmers with a common

objective and interest. Members collaborate to achieve this aim by pooling their existing resources, getting better access to other resources, and sharing in the benefits that ensue. A Farmer Interest Group (FIG) is a self-managed, independent group of farmers with a shared goal and interest. Groups of farmers, who come together spontaneously or through their efforts to answer their own felt needs, are more likely to be effective than groups that are brought together to suit the needs of an external agency.

Objectives of the FIG

- Number of members in a FIG – 15 to 20
- **Pooling Resources:** Members can use their resources combine (land, labor, etc.) to achieve economies of scale.
- **Access to Information:** CIGs/FIGs facilitate access to information, training, and new technologies.
- **Addressing production and marketing challenges:** They can collectively market their produce, potentially securing better prices.
- **Improved Bargaining Power:** By acting together, farmers can increase their bargaining power with buyers and suppliers
- Developing self-help ways.
- Allowing members to benefit from economies of scale.
- Creating a platform for training and information sharing.
- Serving as a focal point for technical and training initiatives.

Characteristics of a group

- Action oriented
- Focus on Single topic
- Limited lifespan
- Members with a vested interest
- The members of Farmers Interest Group should have the age of above 18 years.
- The members of the group should be residents of that particular village.

Activities of a group

- Organizing meetings
- Engage in information sharing (including networking with other groups)
- Obtain technical training
- Conduct field trials

- Improve market networks and make market assessments
- Support individual members based on their needs
- 'Revolving' fund management for group activities
- Technical and product opportunities identification

Roles and responsibilities of Group members

1. **Group Leader:** Overall management responsibility
2. **Deputy Group Leader:** Deputy when Group Leader is unavailable.
3. **Secretary:** Receives, prepares and sends correspondence; takes and maintains minutes
4. **Treasurer/Bookkeeper:** Manages revolving fund
5. **Record Keeper:** Stores and maintains records and reference material

Institutions supporting farmers' groups in India

- ATMA organized farmer's interest groups, Commodity Interest groups and Food security groups.
- Some non-governmental organizations also organized FIGs.
- Farmers' clubs and women's self-help groups were the basic activities of NABARD, and they also organized Joint Liability groups.

Benefits of forming a group

- Access to technical and market information
- Improved buying and selling power
- Likely to maintain useful and relevant activities
- High motivation for sustainability
- Builds social cohesion

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