

Now, post offices to sell seeds to farmers

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Surendra Nagar, Gujarat DJ Parmar, the postmaster of Kukda village of Surendra Nagar district in Gujarat, besides handling letters and money orders, has now taken an additional responsibility. He will take orders from farmers for supplying of seeds prior to the forthcoming kharif sowing season. In the neighbouring Danawada village, post master VS Verma is also gearing up to take the additional responsibility for ensuring that quality seed reaches farmers on time.

Thanks to the unique collaboration between the department of post, Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) and oil exploration major Cairn India, an attempt has been made to provide quality seeds to farmers through the grameen suvidha kendra (GSK). Other services such as daily update on the mandi prices besides MCX spot and futures prices of various agricultural commodities, weather update, addressing technical queries regarding cultivation and arranging scientific warehousing facilities are being provided.

At present, four GSKs operate in Gujarat from rented places taken up at the block level post offices where daily information sheets on prices from nearest mandis, bigger markets and MCX futures market rates of the key agricultural commodities of the region such as wheat, jeera, cotton, castor etc are prepared by Cairn India staff and handed over to the post offices.

The post master of the block post office then sends the information sheet to each of village post offices same day which displays the prices on a board.

“Earlier farmers did not have any knowledge about the prevailing price of agricultural commodities before taking their produce to the nearest mandis. These days they monitor the prices before making a decision to sell or hold their produce,” Parmar told FE.

Besides getting quality seeds delivered at their doorsteps, farmers are registering themselves by paying only Rs 30 per annum at the GSKs where details about them such as land holdings and cropping pattern are recorded.

The registered farmers need to pay about 10% of the prices of seed in advance at the post office along with orders for seeds.

MCX has tied up with various major seed companies such as Syngenta, Mahyco, Pioneer, DSCL and government-owned seed companies for ensuring that not only farmers get quality seeds but also better pricing.

“We will be happy if post offices help us in get genuine seeds as reasonable prices as many agents have cheated us by supplying spurious seeds,” Balu Bhai Narang, a farmer from Danawada village, said.

Eventually, more than 27,000 farmers would be covered in six districts of Gujarat.

"As a unique public-private-partnership (PPP) model, GSK, through the services that it offers, aims to create a silent revolution wherein farmers shift from being mere producers to marketers of their produces," Sarita Bahl, vice-president of group corporate social opportunities, MCX, said.

MCX has about 22 GSKs located across the country. Conceptualised in June 2006, GSK would also link farmers with Nabard for availing agricultural credits and with the agricultural universities for inputs for increasing crop health and yield.

Cairn India, which is laying the world's longest heated and insulated pipeline to transport crude oil from Barmer in Rajasthan to Gujarat, has taken up this initiative to support farmers living on the route of the pipeline in 250 villages.

The efforts are on to extend GSK models to most of the blocks around the pipeline.