It is currently estimated that the Nigerian population is over 166.2 million and agriculture is known to be an important branch of Nigerian economy providing employment for about 70% of the Nigerian population.

One of the challenges of agricultural development in Nigeria is the inability of farmers to access vital information or the information is poorly disseminated with inadequate feedbacks between farmers, research institutes and policy makers in the agricultural sector. Agricultural extension system in the country has been known for a long time to depend on the use of mass media and extension agents in information dissemination and getting of feedbacks, but this system has been marred with a lot of challenges especially in the area of “feedbacks” as majority of farmers depend on radio stations for their source of information without necessarily been able to express their understanding, experience or opinion about an issue that concerns them, while the extension agents where these farmers would have found solace are faced with a lot of irregularities such as inadequate funds for extension services, inadequate number of extension agents, monitoring authorities are not able to get clear feedback on the quality of extension services being delivered in the villages etc.

Fortunately, with the developments of communication technology in Nigeria and the number of active mobile phone users which are currently been estimated by Ventures Africa to be about 110.3 million as at November 2012, making about 66.4% of the entire Nigerian population; this connotes that a decent number of farmers have access to these mobile phones, making it practically possible to attempt the task of bridging the information gap. Therefore the federal ministry of agriculture in collaboration with the telecom service providers should create an Agric call center to improve extension services. The federal ministry of agriculture should liaise with
these telecom operators and reach an agreeable term on how to create a toll free line that can accommodate multiple callers per time and can also be called from any network. It is also important for the telecom organizations to help with personnel trainings and guide the ministry on how to acquire and maintain the call centers infrastructures and facilities since they have decades of experience. The call centres should be created as an arm under the new Department of Agricultural Extension of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, fully equipped, staffed and funded by the ministry. The call centers should function in multiple Nigerian languages and should serve as a means of:

- Information dissemination and feedback mechanism for effective research – extension – farmer linkage
- Enquiry by farmers - Problem solving platform
- A source for market information for farmers, agro input suppliers, commodity traders, etc.
- Means of advertisement for agro-allied industries such as fertilizer, seed, agro chemicals companies etc,

The Funds generated from agro-allied industries advertisement could be used also as part of the operational cost for the call centers, these centers must be monitored by the federal ministry of agriculture and a monthly performance report should be submitted always in order for the ministry to keep proper track records of the current developments in the call centers. The Agric call centers should have a simple set of numbers that could easily be memorized by the farmers (example is 522 or 311 etc).

**ADVANTAGES OF AN AGRIC CALL CENTER**

1. It’s a toll free line where farmers can obtain knowledge and information easily
2. Farmers don’t need to be educated before they can use it

3. It operates a multiple Nigerian language system and cuts across language barriers

4. It’s convenient and easy to use

5. Call centers provide technical assistance to the caller and will record the quarries along with the personnel detail

6. Reduces the problem of inadequate extension agent as most farmers would prefer to call at their convenience rather than keep an appointment with an extension agent, although it is important to note that the usefulness of extension agents cannot be over emphasized as they would be responsible for field demonstrations and other technology transfer services

7. It can be use as a means of reaching out to farmers about a new innovation through call advertisement as it is being practiced by the telecom operators

8. It gives the farmers access to any agric question or topic bothering them which improves feedbacks as calls will be recorded

9. Improves the monitoring of quality extension services in Nigeria as proper records can now be kept

10. Information can be gotten anywhere in the country with network signals

11. Farmers details requested during calls can be used to estimate the amount of farmers using mobile phone
12. It will also enhance fertilizer supply scheme as a result of improved farmer feedback through direct contact with farmers

RECOMMENDATION

Due to poor network problems been experienced in some parts of the country, it is recommended that farmers should get additional networks SIM card different from the one they currently have, so that in case they are experiencing network problem on one, the other will serve, as it is rare to find two network having problem at the same time, or preferably to use the Nigerian Communication Commissions (NCC) mobile number portability scheme, which gives a phone user the advantage of switching from one mobile network to another without changing his mobile phone number, but this scheme is still new and is currently bedeviled by a lot of challenges. This scheme shouldn’t require a particular SIM card or numbers, it should be designed for maximum flexibility, so any number would be able to make calls and get the solution to agric problem at any location provided there is network coverage.

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