

## Utilization Pattern of TNAU banana expert system among Nendren Banana growers in Kanyakumari district.

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**Abstract:** Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for transmission of localized information and services has increased towards making farming socially, economically and environmentally sustainable by Digital Agriculture. Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) has initiated a lot of efforts in digitizing agricultural information to reach the stakeholders. A few expert systems were developed to help farmers and specialists to diagnose plant diseases. The TNAU Banana expert system is one such mobile app, where a farmer can get all solution and information on banana cultivation in just one touch. An experiment was conducted with 40 banana farmers of Kanyakumari district who form the respondents for the study. This paper analyses on Knowledge gain with the support of the TNAU Banana Expert system, which showed significant positive change. The number of technologies adopted above the average adoption level after demonstration was eleven. It which was adopted by only 12.5% of farmers before using the App, while it was 62.5% after the demonstration. The overall increase in Knowledge gain over the existing level was 53.05%.

### Introduction

Rural India is drastically moving towards digitalization and technology in agricultural development. Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for transmission of localized information and services has increased towards making farming socially, economically and environmentally sustainable by Digital Agriculture. The recent advancements in Phone Technology have brought great opportunities to ride over or, 'leapfrog' the costly and redundant technologies that the smallholder farmer could not have afforded otherwise. Trends in digital usage show that India is the third largest smartphone user after China and USA, which hovers around 167.9 million users in 2015. Even though all information is available in public domain, it is a very

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tedious task for farmers to access it. Mobile or Smartphone apps revolutionized the connectivity and is used for transferring personalized agri-information to farmers.

Smartphone applications in the form of mobile apps have changed the agricultural information scenario to a greater extent. TNAU has initiated a lot of efforts in digitizing agricultural information to reach the stakeholders at a faster rate. A few expert systems were developed to help farmers and specialists to diagnose plant diseases. The TNAU Banana Expert System - BES - is one such mobile app, where a farmer can get all solutions and information on banana cultivation in just one touch.

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### TNAU Banana Expert Ssystem - TNAU BES

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Farming apps are the most convenient and useful medium to guide farmers in farming. It gives the guideline for doing farm operations in proper scientific way in crop cultivation, sowing or harvesting of any crop. This digital change is acting as a game-changer for Indian agricultural conditions. Farmers can easily solve their farming problems related to diseasepest or insect attacks or any problems which can otherwise put them in a difficult situation. TNAU BESanana-Expert is one of the seven apps developed for the benefit of the farming community. TNAU BESbanana-expert system is a mobile app, which can enhance the productivity of banana. It is a cheapest information source with quick access and is personalized in nature. The utility in information is the content and the mandate of creation of this app. Most of the apps are useful only for specific information, while others are multi-informant. This app is a helping boost in reducing negative environmental impacts of farming and in increasing production. It helps to diagnose field problems and provides solution to the problems. It serves as a decision support system as well as an information repository with respect to banana cultivation. A farmer with android mobile phone can access this app and get benefitted with many useful information on its agricultural activities.

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### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Kanayakumari district of Tamil Nadu. Forty farmers from two blocks, namely Thuckalay and Thovalai, with maximum area under Naendren banana was selected as and they form the respondents of the study. All these farmers

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had accessibility to android phones. Training was provided and farmers were facilitated to download the TNAU ~~BESanana expert system~~ in Tamil. Hands on skills in utilizing the ~~aApp~~ were provided to the banana farmers. A ~~kK~~ knowledge test was conducted before and after exposure to ~~BESbanana expert system~~ with two months' time interval to assess the effect of the intervention on the mobile app provided to farmers. This time interval enables to assess the usage of the ~~aApp~~ on continued basis. A ~~kK~~ knowledge test was conducted based on semi-structured questions on selected recommended farm operations. The change in Knowledge gain was assessed using paired t test. Symbolic adoption for usage of ~~BESbanana expert system~~ was administered immediately after downloading the ~~aApp~~ in the mobile phones of banana farmers.

### **Results Findings and discussion**

Nendren is a predominant banana variety grown in Kanyakumari district. It is used traditionally for table purpose and for chips making. At present it has been extensively used for value addition with banana powder, ~~bBanana~~ fibre from pseudostem and for making chips at different staged of fruit. Hence, ~~Næ~~endren has large market value and great export potential. Despite trainings and demonstrations, the farmers ~~shown~~ lacking in practicing appropriate technologies at field level. With the intervention of utilization of TNAU ~~BESanana expert system~~, a change in knowledge has been observed and it ~~is~~ detailed below.

Knowledge on 15 farm operations was recorded before intervention and two months after the intervention was provided ~~on~~ the farmers. The Table 4.1 denotes that 77.5 percent of farmers had known desuckering stage of ~~NN~~endren banana and 70 percent had known the varieties suitable for Kanyakumari district. After the intervention was provided, it was observed that maximum Knowledge gain was seen in knowing the symptoms of Calcium deficiency. The district is a high rainfall zone with soil ~~pHpH~~ ranging from 6.5 to 7.5. Symptoms of Calcium deficiency was earlier the least known to the farmers prior to introduction of the TNAU ~~BESBESaApp~~. Value addition is another emerging sector which attracted the rural youth in the recent years. Only as an example, an increase of 105.88 percent of increase in knowledge was observed in value addition aspects of banana (Table 1).

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**Table 1.** Knowledge gain with the support of TNAU Banana Expert Ssystem app.

S. No <sup>o</sup>	Particulars	Knowledge gain			
		Before <u>app</u>		After <u>app</u>	
		No <sup>o</sup>	Percent(%)	No <sup>o</sup>	Percent(%)
1	Variety suitable for Kanyakumari	28	<b>70.00</b>	38	<b>95.00</b>
2	Selection of suckers	21	52.50	32	80.00
3	Method of planting	19	47.50	22	55.00
4	Seed Rate	14	35.00	26	65.00
5	Spacing for Nendren	15	37.50	27	67.50
6	Sucker treatment	16	40.00	20	50.00
7	Variety for culinary purpose	23	57.50	39	<b>97.50</b>
8	Fertigation benefits	17	42.50	32	80.00
9	Micronutrient application	11	27.50	17	42.50
10	Symptoms of Calcium deficiency	5	12.50	11	27.50
11	Prolinge	21	52.50	23	57.50
12	Desuckering stage	31	<b>77.50</b>	36	<b>90.00</b>
13	Pseudo stem weevil control	14	35.00	27	67.50
14	Sigatoka leaf spot identification	10	25.00	16	40.00
15	Value addition in banana	17	42.50	35	<b>87.50</b>
<b>Knowledge gain on average: ..... 53,05%</b>					

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Knowledge on 15 farm operations was recorded before intervention and two months after the intervention was provided to the farmers. The table denotes that 75.5 percent of farmers had known desuckering stage of nendren banana and 70 percent had known the varieties suitable for Kanyakumari district. After the intervention was provided it was observed that maximum knowledge gain was seen in knowing the symptoms of Calcium deficiency. The district is a high rainfall zone with soil ph ranging from 6.5 to 7.5. Symptoms of Calcium deficiency was earlier the least known to the farmers prior to introduction of the TNAU Banana App. Value addition is another emerging sector which attracted the rural youth in the recent years. 105.88 percent of increase in knowledge was observed in value addition aspects of banana.

Paired t test shows that:

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Paired sample T-test, using T(df:39) distribution (two-tailed):

1.  $H_0$  hypothesis.

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Since the p-value  $< \alpha$ ,  $H_0$  is rejected.

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The After population's average is considered to be not equal to the Before population's average.

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In other words, the sample difference between the averages of After and Before is big enough to be statistically significant.

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2. P-value.

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The p-value equals **0.000619**, ( $P(x \leq 3.724) = 0.9997$ ). It means that the chance of type I error (rejecting a correct  $H_0$ ) is small: 0.000619 (0.062%). The smaller the p-value, the more it supports  $H_1$ .

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3. Test statistic.

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The test statistic **T** equals **3.724**, which is not in the 95% region of acceptance: [-2.0227, 2.0227].

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The 95% confidence interval of **After minus Before** is: [1.599, 5.401].

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#### 4. Effect size.

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The observed effect size **d** is medium, 0.59. This indicates that the magnitude of the difference between the average of the differences and the expected average of the differences is medium.

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The results show that there is highly significant change in knowledge among the farmers who have used the technology.

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#### Overall change in knowledge and expression of symbolic adoption

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Farmers in the district traditionally follow the practices prevalent in the area and the knowledge departed to them by their ancestors. Farmers' reaction after exposure to this ICT enabled service **to bewas** recorded in the form of symbolic adoption expressed by them.

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**Table 2.** Overall change in knowledge and expression of symbolic adoption

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Particulars	Symbolic Adoption	
	N <sup>o</sup> e	(%) <sup>1/</sup>
Before intervention	15	37.5
After intervention	27	67.5

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<sup>1/</sup>Percentage over the total responders (40).

Symbolic adoption of the **aApp** was given by 37.5% of the farmers before demonstration and 67.5% after demonstration. The overall increase in **Kknowledge** gain over the existing level was **24.17%**.

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#### Perception about relevancy to the need of banana farmers

Farmers' perception about the relevancy of TNAU **BESExpert system** to the technological need of banana farmers in the district was assessed. The results are given in **Ttable** 3.

**Table 3.** Perception of farmers on relevancy of Banana Expert Ssystem – BES.

N=40

S. N <sup>o</sup>	Farmers perception about TNAU Banana expert systemES	N <sup>o</sup>	Percentage
1	Repetition to retrieve is possible	40	100.00
2	Language is simple	39	97.50
3	Accessible to related agricultural information	38	95.00
4	Easy to use	38	95.00
5	Updated Information available	35	87.50
6	Helps in getting relevant information	34	85.00
7	Content is adequate and complete	33	82.50
8	Timeliness of the messages available	29	72.50
9	Effective in solving farmers need and problems	27	67.50
10	Helps in information on value addition	26	65.00

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Perception on repetition in retrieval (100%) was given by all respondents. Farmers can easily understand due to simple local language (97.5%). Accessibility and easey to use was expressed by 95% of the respondents. Information on Value addition was givenatthe least by 65% of farmers, as the information provided was less adequate and not individualistic.

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### Conclusions

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The expert system developed for banana by TNAU can be used to provide farmers with reliable information on integrated crop management, integrated nutrient management and integrated pest and disease management, thereby promoting a more remunerative agriculture development. The study that depicts that the farmers utilizing this mobile app are more efficient in diagnosing field problems in banana. The extension workers can demonstrate and train the farmers in using this mobile app. Both central and state governments are focusing in augmenting ICT applications in Agriculture. This expert system created by TNAU could improve the knowledge in new production

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technologies by the farmers, which can in turn enhance their income. The future of agriculture lies in digital transformation. Efforts made have to be spread to grass root levels to make the mission of deliverance more successful.

#### References

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3. Website: [https://agritech.tnau.ac.in/expert\\_system/banana/index.html](https://agritech.tnau.ac.in/expert_system/banana/index.html)

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