Use of Internet-Based Information Management Systems as Tools to Improve Extension Efficiency

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Introduction

Extensionists face a number of challenges in providing an effective service to their clients. Liaison between parties, communication of ideas, organisation of information, and information management are all factors that can affect the performance and efficiency of the service being provided. To tackle the challenges posed above, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (South Africa) has embraced the use of an internet-based Information Management System. The system, known as Agtrack (www.agtrack.net), was commissioned in July 2001 and has already demonstrated the benefits of well managed information on which to base management decisions.

Purpose of the Poster

The purpose of the poster will be to explain the philosophy, application, and results of the Agtrack system, and to present the idea as a tool for use in other areas of extension methodology.

Major Points to be Presented

- Design of a successful Information Management System
- Application of a successful Information Management System
- Management using an Information Management System
- Information Management needs in South African extension
- Potential for similar systems in extension
- The use of an integrated GIS, deployed over the internet
- Spatial information as a management tool

Conclusions

Agtrack is a working information management system that currently manages the planning, implementation, progress, budget, and expenditure of agricultural development projects in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The application is accessible over the internet, and is hence accessible to geographically dispersed users. The Agtrack system models existing Departmental project identification and implementation workflow, thereby ensuring that information captured is relevant and available. Agtrack is currently providing information and data summaries allowing progress monitoring, planning and management decisions never possible before. In an information and communications poor country like South Africa, Agtrack has centralised the monitoring of project progress, whilst decentralising the management of the information. There is unbounded scope for the development of similar systems in extension programmes where management decisions need to be based on performance.