

# Use technology to keep farmers connected

**CONNECTIONS** are like spider networks, which keep people connected. Networks play a very important role in the success of farmers, particularly when they start agriculture as a main source of livelihood. The networks may be formal, informal and act in vertical and horizontal directions.

These types of networks help farmers in many ways, such as transfer of new agriculture technology, learning from each other, exchanging information to boost their business, maintaining flow in the trading of agriculture products, and remaining up to date about government schemes and promotions offered by private sector for farmers' development.

Horizontal networks are mostly being used by farmers at various lev-

els. In this type, a farmer connects with another farmer in the area for mutual interests and benefits. Farmer-to-farmer connections are considered stronger from the farmers' lens, as they further facilitate networking with farmers at the local, regional, national and international levels. Malaysian farmers are already connected with each other. However, there is a need to strengthen these networks at the village level.

Informational extension education techniques can be used to motivate so-called left-behind farmers to shoulder the agriculture development process. Agriculture extension officers rendering services in the designated areas can accelerate this process so that farmers' horizontal connectivity disparity will not become a



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hurdle in the farmers' local development process. Information and communications technologies (ICT) are one of best measures to strengthen farmers' networks and ultimately the farming community is digitally connected with each other.

Vertical connectivity can trigger the local development process. In this type of networking, farmers are

linked with state and local organisations. For example, Jawatankuasa Kemajuan Dan Keselamatan Kampung (JKKK) is a well-known village-based organisation that connects farmers at the local level.

Another example is a cooperative and wholesaler association that also facilitates farmers at various stages. However, such societies and net-

works are lacking in almost all the states in the country. If these networks are not strengthened or established in true spirit, then food security and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be difficult to achieve. Similarly, the competencies of agriculture extension staff may be properly harnessed in this regard so that these front line workers better

guide farmers and societies to work on win-win strategies.

Connections are like veins in the body that keep our internal system functioning well. Farmers networks are needed at all levels as they will become the voice of the farmer, build confidence, enhance capacity, improve risk taking, bridge technology gaps, eliminate gender discrim-

ination, explore leadership, and direct farmers about what should and should not be in the agriculture sector. Farmers who want to abandon this sector can also be retained due to the farmers' networks.

Farmers in a network can handle agricultural risks easily and on a sustainable basis. Public and private sectors also need to strengthen the farmers' networks by allocating more funds for overall national advancement. The hidden potential of youth can also be harvested in establishing new farmer-based networks, which could spur the socio-economic development of the area particularly and at the national scale generally. ICT can also be used to reinforce the networks at all tiers and keep the farmers digitally connected any time and anywhere.

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