

AWARENESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOLL FREE AGRICULTURAL
ADVISORY SERVICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (STUDY
CONDUCTED IN ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT)

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Toll free agricultural advisory service (Govi Sahana Sarana Sevaya) is a newly established extension communication system of the Department of Agriculture (DOA). Farmers contact this service for their queries over any fixed phone or mobile phone during office hours by dialing 1920. This service is one of the major programs conducted by the DOA to help farmers in solving their problems related to technical issues as well as input purchasing and output marketing. DOA bears high cost to offer this service as telephone bills, salaries, knowledge updating programs etc. Therefore, the progress of this service needs to be evaluated in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme. This study was conducted to assess the progress and identify the limitations of the service and the level of farmer awareness and effectiveness of the service.

A field survey was conducted with a random sample of 100 farmers and a random sample of 20 Agricultural Instructors attached to the sampled Agrarian Service Centers (ASC) and the technical staff of the 1920 service and the officers who are maintaining the database at the Audio Visual center (AVC), Gannoruwa. Survey was conducted in Anuradhapura district in year 2008.

Results indicated that there has been a significant increase in the number of queries received by the 1920 service during the period from 2006 to 2007. Out of the survey respondents, 59% were not aware about 1920 while 41% were aware. Out of total respondents who were aware about the service, 85% (35% of the sample) knew that 1920 is a charge free service and of which only 79% knew that this is a totally free service. Of respondents who were aware of 1920 facility, 39% had called 1920 to find solutions to their agricultural problems. The average level of education of the respondents is less than G.C.E O/L. There should be proper awareness program to popularize of this service as this majority of respondents have become aware of this service through the television. Sixty percent of the farmers who had contacted the toll free service were satisfied with the information provided and 95% of the Agricultural Instructors stated that the toll free service is highly effective and it has eased their work.

Based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that the use of television should be increased to make the general public aware of the service. Trainings should be provided

to the technical staff on communication techniques. District level records on the services provided should be made available to the agricultural Instructors at ACSs in order to enhance the effectiveness of the service.

Key words: Toll free service, Awareness, Effectiveness, Agrarian Service Centers (ASC)