

# USER EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURAL LIBRARIES

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## Introduction

There has been a movement towards a proactive library system concerned with attracting potential users and utilizing the library information resources as fully as possible in which user education figures prominently. User education should not be taken to mean educating the users in basics of library cataloguing, classification, and indexing systems, so as to make the library staff's job easier. Library is a service organisation and therefore the aim of a user education programme should be for more efficient use of library services by the users.

There is a growing interest in the promotion of user education in the research and academic libraries in the country. In many universities and research institutions in the country, there exist special lecture programmes and short duration courses for the promotion of the use of libraries in connection with research and studies. At Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, and some of the Agricultural University Libraries, viz. G. B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, etc. a compulsory course programme itself on library and information techniques is given

for all students at the graduate and post graduate level.

## Course Programme

To draw up a user-education programme, there is a need to ascertain the areas of interest and the present approach to library services by various client groups. Analysis of the published works of the staff on the references they cite can be useful in giving an objective insight into the extent and pattern of library use.

The Course Programme should contain:

- i) An Introduction to the particular Library and Information Centre
- ii) Information Systems in Agriculture
- iii) Classification Systems
- iv) Reading Techniques
- v) Manual Information Retrieval
- vi) Computerized Information Retrieval
- vii) Personal Record Keeping
- viii) Document Storage

There should be provision for the relevant practical exercises in the programme.

For students the course should be instituted in the first year of their studies at the

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University. In an R & D Institution the training programme should be a short duration course for a week or so comprising of fifteen to twenty lectures. In a crops research institute, a slack period in the growing season is perhaps suitable.

Brochures explaining the services available at the Agricultural Library have to be produced in order to provide orientation for the students, researchers etc.

It is better to give training in small groups of ten or twelve for an intensive programme (education).

### Teaching Aids.

Many secondary abstracting services such as Biological Abstracts, Chemical Abstracts, World Agricultural Information System (AGRIS), Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux (CAB), etc. bring out attractive slide packages for the purpose of imparting training to their user clientele may be obtained and made use of for the purpose.

### Analysis of the Services

People involved in managing information services and those involved in training information workers can gain from taking a marketing approach to the analysis of needs and expectations of particular groups of users. Actual use and users' satisfaction with available information services and products must also be measured. The range of library services should be fully explained, which is much more than any given library's holdings, for example, a library can obtain

a book through inter-library loan, a reel or xerox copy on exchange from another library, have access to other libraries, collection in far away places through online information services etc. Feedback from users about required additions as well as specialised services such as Current Awareness Service (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Translation, Computer Searches etc. will keep the programme attuned to the users' needs.

Periodical assessment about library services, utility of library collections, through questionnaires by which timely improvements can be effected.

A post training evaluation and invited suggestions from the trainees will lead towards continued updating of the education programme.

### Conclusion.

In recent years there has been a movement towards concentration on user needs. The development of user education which involves introducing potential users to information resources available in the libraries and providing training in methods of information retrieval, is one of the library functions that can be expected to grow rapidly in the coming years. The success of library user education programmes will greatly depend on the extent to which these can be integrated into the academic education programmes available.

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