

Press Note

DBT FarmerZone™ : First All Partners Meeting Held at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi May 21- May 22, 2018

MANDI: The Department of Biotechnology's FarmerZone™, an initiative to deliver integrated seed-to-market advisory to farmers through data collection, curation and analysis, concluded its first all partners meeting in IIT Mandi on May 22nd 2018. The two-day dialogue delineated the roles and responsibilities of various national and international partners in creating the FarmerZone™ Potato Sentinel, the first phase in the development of the FarmerZone™ service which will validate and demonstrate the application of big data and machine learning to creating locally relevant and on-demand advisory to meet the specific needs of the farmers. Hosted by the Director of IIT Mandi, Prof. Timothy A. Gonsalves, the meeting was chaired by Prof. K Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India.

Attendees included Dr. Shailja Gupta, Adviser, International Partnerships, DBT, Mr. Daniel Shah, Research Councils United Kingdom (RCUK), Scientists from the Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI) led by Dr. V.K. Dua. A Mr Sachin Shinde from Kisan Hub, Mr. Jang Bahadur Sangha of the Sangha Farmer Cooperative, Dr. David Hughes, University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Andre Laperriere, Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition (GODAN) and Mr. Manohar Swaminathan, Microsoft Research Institute, Prof. Mario Caccamo and Dr. Simon Smart from The National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB), Mr. Swapan Mehra and Team, IORA Ecological Solutions, Ms. Chhaya Bhandi and Team, Vertiver Creative Agency, Mr. S. Ravinkumar, Tata Consultancy Services Limited and Mr. Rajendra Kumar, Lahaul Potato Growers.

"DBT FarmerZone™ has been conceived to meet the urgent needs of farmers in India. The emergence of affordable ICT applications and the unprecedented convergence of spatial and digital data equips us to create tools that provide farm-relevant customized advisory that farmers can finally trust. Improving farmer livelihoods and food security are urgent priorities that FarmerZone™ will tackle" said Dr. Renu Swarup, Secretary DBT.

Extensive research of farmer needs conducted by the FarmerZone™ team revealed that there are hundreds of digital data driven advisories in the market ranging from online advisory to smartphone apps and SMS based services. However, there is still a strong need for an integrated, consistent and trustworthy advisory platform, that meets all the needs of farmers across aspects of agriculture and is backed by the Government of India.

"FarmerZone™ will provide advisory across all aspects of farming through a universally accessible centralized cloud-based platform. All stakeholders in the agri value chain in India, including individual farmers, private sector actors, cooperatives, NGOs and others will simply be able to plug into the FarmerZone™ platform and offer tangible solutions for farmers putting decision-making tools from seed-to-market right at the farmers' fingertips." stated Professor K VijayRaghavan, Chair of FarmerZone™ .

The FarmerZone™ Potato Sentinel online advisory and app will be launched by July 2018. These will be designed to address specific potato farmer needs. The prototype developed will be validated initially with farmers from Punjab, UP and Himachal Pradesh. An interactive and iterative process of data collection, analysis and distribution will continue to scale up the advisory to more crops and the rest of India.

Professor Timothy Gonsalves, Director, IIT Mandi said, *“Given IIT Mandi’s location in the Himalayas, applying science & technology for the benefit of farmers is key to IIT Mandi’s vision. Many faculty and students from various disciplines are involved in FarmerZone™ which will bring the fruits of the artificial intelligence revolution to benefit small and medium farmers. Working with the nearby CPRI, Shimla will enable us to reach large numbers of farmers. We welcome the participation of Indian industry and international institutions in FarmerZone™ .”*

Speaking on behalf of the ICAR—Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI), a key participant, Dr. D.K. Dua said that *“an integrated approach to potato farming has been the focus of CPRI’s research and partnering this core capability with FarmerZone™ team including with IIT MANDI, and other national and international institutes will result in delivery of effective translation of reserach results to on field actions for our farmers.”*

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