

Question Guide for Providing Technical Assistance and Training to Outgrowers

(Excerpt from AFE's "Facilitating the Development of Outgrowing Operations: A Manual." Following each question is information and "example responses" that the Facilitator can review and use as a reference when discussing the questions with the LF)

What kind of technical assistance and training will you provide to your outgrowers?

Along with good quality seeds, outgrowers tend to value company technical assistance (TA) more than anything else. This assistance can include training/ coaching sessions, field-based technical advice and demonstrations. Technical assistance helps outgrowers produce according to company specifications and realize yields and quality that benefit both outgrower and company. Technical assistance also can increase outgrower productivity; make company operations more cost effective; and improve farmer profitability, all of which builds mutual trust and loyalty. TA also encourages and motivates outgrowers.

The following questions can assist the company to determine the types of TA to provide outgrowers.

FIELD-BASED TECHNICAL SUPPORT (EXTENSION)

1) What are field agent tasks and objectives when providing technical advice and extension services to outgrowers during field visits?

- Give instant, on-the-spot advice
- Respond quickly to crop disease
- Answer specific questions and concerns
- Monitor the correct application of and adherence to prescribed production packages
- Plan production schedules and progress towards harvest
- Plan for procurement
- Provide farmers with feedback on rejections, poor production, etc.
- Advise on post-harvest practices (drying, storage, etc.)
- Provide farmers with written prescriptions for the necessary chemicals that they can take to input suppliers
- Take digital pictures and share with experts (including international experts).

Company field agents can use outgrower record books to monitor the technical information provided to farmers. These books become part of the management information system (*see Question Guide #14 - Management Information Systems*) that the company uses to track outgrower performance, review recommendations, etc.

TRAINING / COACHING

2) What topics and activities will you cover in outgrower training / coaching sessions?

- Recommended agronomic practices
- Post-harvest issues
- Issues related to outgrowing operations, planting schedules, etc.
- Distribution of seeds or other inputs
- Introductions to higher level people in the company
- Expert assistance in input supply, production and financial services by specialists in those and other relevant areas
- Past season results and adjusting practices for the upcoming season
- Discussion on procurement plans.

3) How will you develop training / coaching session content?

- The company training / coaching team can develop a training module or session plan that details the session approach and content and ensures the same message is delivered during multiple sessions with different trainers

- Experience shows that training programs including practical field visits provide better learning opportunities for outgrowers than those limited to classroom learning.

4) Who will be part of your training / coaching team?

- Company field staff
- Lead farmers
- Expert farmers, recruited as trainers, who have the following qualifications:
 - Extensive experience growing the targeted crop
 - Basic education
 - Good communication skills and speaking voice
 - Sufficient time to devote to coaching
 - Self-confidence
- Selected resource people.

5) Where and when will you organize outgrower training / coaching sessions?

- There are advantages to arranging training sites near demonstration plots to facilitate field demonstrations
- They should fit within the crop calendar (before planting, harvesting, etc.)
- Common options include:
 - Three sessions—one prior to planting, one during the growing season, and the last before harvesting
 - Two sessions—one prior to planting and the other before harvesting.

6) How can you make your training / coaching sessions cost effective?

- Engage input suppliers, and other service providers who have a commercial interest in contributing to the training
- Include local *expert farmers* on the training team; outgrowers can relate to them and they are less expensive than high level resource persons
- Limit duration and use a low-cost training site
- There is a trade-off between larger and smaller groups—large groups may be more cost effective, but small groups offer better learning opportunities.

7) How will you develop your training / coaching team capacity?

- Organize a training of trainers (TOT) workshop for the training / coaching teams to:
 - Make sure that trainers are familiar with the training modules (including all technical issues)
 - Introduce adult learning methodologies
 - Allow them to practice the training before giving it to farmers
- Invite expert farmer candidates to the TOT, evaluate them and select the best ones.

8) How can you motivate field agents to provide training and technical support to outgrowers?

- Provide professional development opportunities such as training, exposure visits, etc.
- Offer awards and recognition for good work
- Develop performance-based remuneration packages to improve their commitment to and the effectiveness of their technical support.

9) What techniques can you use to promote good production practices and motivate outgrowers?

- Guided visits for outgrowers to selected farmers' fields to observe good practices
- Visits by company managers to farmers' fields lets managers see reality on the ground and motivates farmers by making them feel part of and valued by the company
- Visits to farmers by company buyers also can motivate the outgrowers
- Visits by outgrowers to company factories and offices
- Recognition such as *Best Outgrower of the Year*, *Best Lead Farmer of the Year*, etc.