

Training the people who will take India's farming forward

Syngenta Foundation India (SFI) provides training in agricultural technology, agronomic practices and workplace skills. So far, seven Training Centers for Agriculture Technology Assistants (ATA) teach in four languages. SFI partners with the National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj*, as well as various NGOs. We asked Katre Ravindra, Project Coordinator, Trainings and Skill Development to tell us more.



What is your personal connection with this initiative?

I've been involved with this initiative from the start. Together with internal and external stakeholders, I helped design the training content. I was also involved in shortlisting the training institutes and anchoring the first batch of ATA trainings in three centers.

What is the aim of the scheme?

Our students follow an intensive 45-day residential program. They emerge as competent and readily employable Agricultural Technology Assistants, with skills relevant to their particular region.

Why is there a need for this now?

For effective implementation of development projects, efficient "last mile" agents /extension workers are vital. Our approach is to train a cadre of rural youth called 'agri-entrepreneurs', who can provide services to small farmers. The primary reason for starting an ATA training initiative was to select some young people with the right attitude. From a batch of 25 who undergo ATA training, we usually select 7-8 of them as agri-entrepreneurs. The remainder join agribusinesses as field or extension agents.

Where are the ATA Centers?

The current seven are in Nanded, Jawhar, Pune and Ahmednagar (State of Maharashtra), Hyderabad (Telangana), Ranchi (Jharkhand) and Kalahandi (Odisha). Others are being set up in Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Karnataka.



How do you structure the training?

It's 60% theory, 40% practical, with interactive classes, field visits, individual and group assignments and presentations. Topics include the region's agro-climate, soil health, seed and water management, weed and pest control, extension management, types of farm implements and machinery, and the law and regulations affecting the industry.

There's also an emphasis on teaching workplace skills. These include communication and interpersonal skills, use of IT and social media, and how to behave at work and have a positive attitude and self-confidence.

Who designed the program?

The overall concept and a large portion of the content came from SFI agriculture experts. We also received help from external stakeholders. They included senior agri-business executives, financial institutions, NGOs, consultants, academics and government officials.

How do students get onto the program?

They need a 12th grade pass (or 10th with relevant work experience), preferably from the region, and an interest in working in agriculture. The selection process is a written test, psychometric test and interview.



Who are the teachers?

Existing personnel from SFI who are specifically trained to teach adults using this methodology. There are at least two trainers per center.

How many people have you trained?

About 140 by March 2017. We aim to have trained at least 700 by the end of the year, maybe as many as 1000! It's a really exciting program that is successfully furthering SFI's goal to train the human resources who are so vital to India's agricultural development. Helping resource-poor farmers to apply improved technologies will lead to better productivity and higher incomes, and that's what SFI aims to do.

The Syngenta Foundation thanks Elise Frisch for the classroom photos

* nird.org.in