

IFA INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP on Effective Last-Mile Delivery

10-12 February 2010, New Delhi, India

WELCOME REMARKS

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Welcome Remarks by Ajay S. Shriram
President of IFA

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you in New Delhi. The IFA International Workshop on Effective Last-Mile Delivery is the first event organized by the International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA) that is fully dedicated to the transfer of agricultural technology and knowledge to the farmer. This event is part of IFA's activities aimed at fostering the adoption of fertilizer best management practices by small-scale farmers in order to improve profitability of farming, increase the agricultural output to meet the requirements of the fast growing world population, and to reduce as much as possible our footprint on the environment. As you understand, this initiative is expected to meet the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The IFA initiative on effective last-mile delivery was launched at the IFA Annual Conference in May 2009, as a follow-up to the IFA initiative on fertilizer best management practices. The New Delhi workshop is expected to help the fertilizer industry and its partners identify strategies to best disseminate information to the farmers, so that they can optimize the benefits arising from the use of fertilizer best management practices. A number of innovative initiatives have been launched in India through successful partnerships between fertilizer companies, the information technology sector and international agricultural research centers, among others. Actions are also taken in many other parts of the world, and we can definitively learn from each other's experiences.

Your focus during the workshop will be on South Asia and Africa, two regions that are severely affected by under- and malnutrition, and where adoption of modern farming practices is dramatically low. The outcome of your deliberations will also be relevant to small farmers in the other developing regions. I am confident that this initiative, if translated into action through multi-stakeholder partnerships, can contribute to improving the situation of millions of farmers.

Productivity and yield improvement is necessary from another point of view: food security. It is estimated that, by 2050, the world will need 70% more food than today. With land area for agriculture going down, improving yield and productivity is absolutely essential.

It is increasingly evident from experience that we have to engage farmers more on a relationship basis than only on a transactional one. This calls for an ongoing interface or partnership between the corporate and the farming community. There are many examples of successful contract farming which enables supply of knowledge and inputs to the farmers on an ongoing basis, for a mutually beneficial result. Perhaps during the deliberations in the workshop, we would consider how can such partnership models need to be expanded to cover more regions and crops. The experience of the Indian sugar industry in working closely with the farmers to improve their productivity and quality of sugarcane has some good examples in this area.

I am very pleased that we were able to gather such a diverse and complementary audience, with delegates coming from all over the world. This will be a unique occasion to exchange information and views on the challenges and opportunities.

I think that input suppliers such as the members of IFA clearly have an important responsibility in furthering the dissemination of last-mile delivery of knowledge to the farmers

and thereby improving their economic condition. It is in this context that the current initiative taken by IFA in forming the Task Force has to be viewed.

Before concluding, I just like to mention a few words about our company DCM Shriram Consolidated Limited. We have very strong exposure to agriculture through various businesses that we are engaged in. The interface to the farmer is the cornerstone of our approach to these businesses. Nearly ten years ago, we initiated a pioneering programme to deliver extension services on round the year basis, without linkage to sale of products, through our Shriram Agri Development Programme. We also work very closely with about 250,000 farmers in our sugar area for cane development.

Our latest initiative is the opening of Hariyali Kisaan Bazaar outlets in 300 locations to deliver quality knowledge and multi-brand products to the farming community to help improve their productivity and hence profitability.

We believe that businesses can work with the farming community to create a win-win and sustainable business models. I do hope that many of you would accept our invitation to visit one of the Hariyali outlets on 12 February 2010.

I would like to wish you very successful and stimulating deliberations, and a pleasant stay in New Delhi to all those of you who come from abroad.

Thank you.