



Farmer Focus Groups – Seasonal Calendar –

Tips & Facts Sheet

How to conduct a farmer focus group

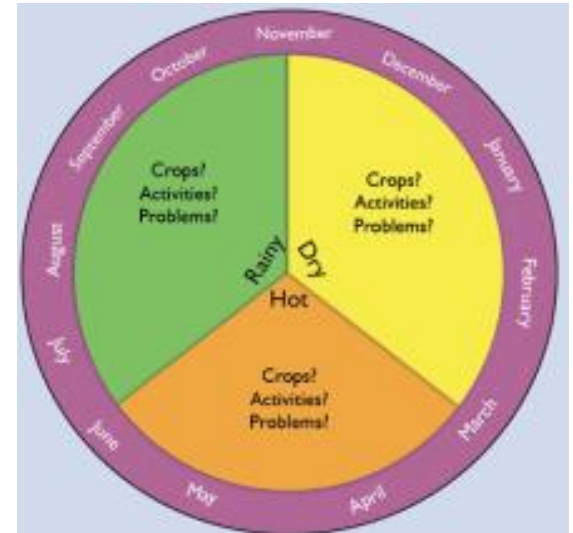
Farmer focus groups are used to identify community needs. The approach below uses a seasonal cropping calendar as the central discussion tool. Men and women's participation may vary by season and crop cycles. Gaining contributions from both men and women farmers will provide a more complete picture of community activities and highlight differences between groups.

Introduction, Welcome and Goals

- Introduce group members and any visitors
- Outline the purpose of the meeting (i.e. understand farmers' main problems using seasonal calendar)
- Note that discussions will be recorded on posted sheets for ease of discussion
- Note that participant comments remain anonymous
- Ask for respect (i.e. do not interrupt others while speaking and note there are no wrong or right answers.)
- Indicate meeting duration (best to keep it under 1 hour)

Materials and Format

The moderator introduces the seasonal cropping calendar to the group, which is used as a visual aid with the questions below. The facilitator uses two large sheets of paper. One is used to record both the crops for each season and any special management practices for the crops (figure at right). The other sheet is used to record problems as stated by the farmers. These sheets are posted, if possible, so farmers can see the notes as they are taken.



Example of seasonal cropping calendar.

Questions

Start questions at a seasonal level, then go down to the crop level and then to specific management, business activities and problems for the most important crops. Ideally, this approach brings attention to all major aspects of the farming system in a given community.

- What are the main constraints corresponding to each season?
- What crops do you grow in each season?
- What are major constraints or problems for each crop?
- Are there crops that you used to grow but have since abandoned? If yes, why?
- Please explain the farming activities that are carried out for the major crops (including purchase of inputs, production, postharvest, marketing)?
- What are constraints for each activity?
- What other problems are occurring?

**Use field visits to confirm problems
identified during discussions.**

Grouping, Ranking and Scoring of Problems

The moderator presents the flip-chart paper to the group with all of the recorded problems. Farmers are asked to identify the three most important problems, either by voting or writing down which numbers are most important to them. Read problems out loud to overcome any potential literacy barriers. Results are tallied and presented. Some discussion may follow the ranking of problems and the facilitator will continue to record these comments.

Closing

The farmers are thanked for participating in the focus group discussion. A small, culturally appropriate, gift of appreciation may be given to the farmers to thank them for their input.



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