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Promotion among prospective farmers

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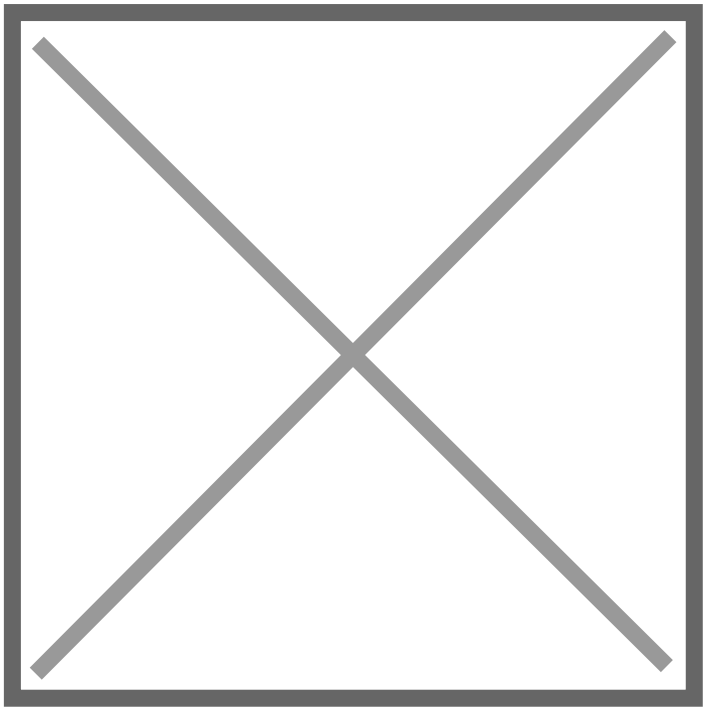

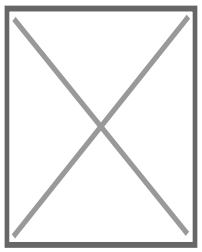

Mr M M Saoji
Director, marketing, Ankur Seeds, Nagpur

The author has experience of three decades with Ankur Seeds. He successfully conceptualized and established many products in cotton, field crops and vegetables. Presently, Ankur Seeds is operational in 20 states of the country. His customer insight and focus on brand pull has enabled the company to reach a
new zenith.

The life sciences industry is one of the most interesting and challenging industries in the world today, because of its vibrancy and solution-providing potential. However, there is an inherent challenge for corporate leaders in the life science companies to exude confidence in their processes and product-development capabilities, while remaining true to the complexity of what it takes to develop a product, survive lengthy clinical and field trials, and bring it to market. Marketing in biotechnology needs to foster objectivity, report facts and steer clear of hype. Truth needs to be communicated to both, the stakeholders and the public.

Industry background
Among all the divisions of biotechnology, bioagri has huge potential as we have already witnessed that “Indian farmers are the world’s fastest adopters of Bt cotton technology”, owing to the immense benefit associated with it. Today, India has got the highest area under Bt cotton in the world (98 percent of the total cotton in India is Bt cotton). As a result, cotton has become the biggest success story in Indian agriculture since the Green Revolution.

In a country struggling with stagnant yields in most crops, cotton has been the one exception. Production soared from 13.6 million bales in 2002-03 to 31.2 million bales in 2010-11, a figure that catapulted India into the big league, enabling it to account for as much as 23 percent of the global production in 2010 and a significant chunk of the forex earnings through the export of cotton yarn.

Bt cotton technology adoption success can be compared with information technology and mobile technology, but when we consider the end user profile, the success dimension of Bt cotton becomes even more significant. Thus, without any iota of doubt, we can say that bioagri is going to play a key role in shaping India’s rapidly developing rural economy in the coming years. This is evident from the growth rate of bioagri, which has been the highest among all the biotech segments since the last four-to-five years.

Challenges of patent protection
Considering the huge investment required in developing new biotech agri products, the seed industry has been waiting

eagerly to have an effective product patent act in place from the concerned authority to motivate the companies to make investments in order to innovate and develop newer, better products for early release in the market.

Production planning

Bt cotton seed production planning is a very complex activity as it has to be planned one year in advance at the corporate level and all the risk associated with it are to be faced by the company itself. Over and above all, production quantum has to be estimated before seeing the actual product performance in the field.

Acreage under cotton crop depends upon commodity rates of the produce and crop economics of substitute crop. Thus, estimating the actual demand of product are dependent on some uncontrollable factors. Similarly, cotton seeds are produced in open field conditions and are exposed to weather vagaries. All these factors make it very difficult to match the actual market demand as a result of which, sometimes, we end up with excess supply and some other times, with short supply. As seeds are perishable goods, accurate forecasting of the particular product is of immense significance.

Capital funding

With the advent of Bt cotton in India, stake of Indian seed companies in this business has increased manifold. The higher cost of production has put a lot of pressure on the financials of the seed company. However, none of the channel members, being unorganized, share the financial burden so that the company can free some money from the working capital to invest in future projects in order to support R&D, initiate and sustain new projects in the bioagri field.

Technology harvest

Seed companies dealing with biotech products are not done with their jobs until and unless they provide after-sales service to existing customers for harvesting maximum leverage out of biotech products and enabling these companies to show their real worth through propagation of certain cultivation practices such as, proper spacing, balanced use of fertilizers and micronutrients in split doses, irrigation at critical stages, spray of appropriate pesticide for control of sucking pest and understanding of the economic threshold limit concept. This technology communication is being done by Ankur seeds at its own level very piously by looking into the benefit arising out of the agriculture extension wing of the government could help in propagating the same with brisk pace.

Technology dissemination

We understand that in the seed business, we are required to potray successfully-raised crops to the prospective farmers, since ‘seeing is believing’. It is the best means to propagate the new technology but it is also a costly means of promotion. Thus, government support is solicited in further promotion of the technology among non-users.

Government regulatory structure

Taking into account the huge success of Bt Cotton, Indian farmers are expecting further advanced products in seeds with the potential to mitigate their misery through reduced cost of cultivation and increased production.

Different agri-biotech projects are in pipeline with different seed companies like, herbicide resistance in cotton, drought tolerance in cotton, sucking pest resistance in rice and cotton, herbicide resistance in corn and cotton, and uniform boll bursting in cotton.

However, these are not able to reach farmers because of complex government clearance system. Streamlining India’s regulatory framework through the inception of a single window product clearance system with well-defined parameters in the biopharma sector, wherein certain set of clinical trials for a specified period are required for the release of vaccine or medicine, has to be put into place.