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IPL in the Service of Farmers

Indian Potash Limited (IPL) has completed more than 50 years in fertiliser trade in India. IPL has equity partners from private, public and cooperative sector of fertiliser industry. The organisation was set-up for import, handling, promotion and marketing of potash in the entire country. The organisation has grown with vast network of dealers across the country and enlarged the product basket from MOP to AS, urea, DAP, SSP, RP, SOP, gypsum and cattle feed. IPL field staff have been rendering excellent agronomic services through various extension activities. IPL has also collaborated with CIDA, ICEF, IPC, PPIC and K+S GmbH for implementation of agriculture and rural development projects. Understanding the needs of farming community and assisting them to enhance their prosperity has been the driving force behind IPL's sales promotion and extension activities.

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INDIAN POTASH LIMITED (IPL), ONE OF the oldest members of Fertiliser Industry in India, celebrated its golden jubilee on 17.6.2005. IPL in its life span of 50 years has kept its focus on farmers that enabled it to increase their sales volume from 11 thousand tonnes in 1955-56 to 36.76 lakh tonnes of fertilisers during 2004-05. The turnover in this period has increased from Rs.34.31 lakh to 3289.05 crores. The success story of IPL is the result of vigorous promotional and marketing efforts put in over the years. Half a century is a long period in the life of any business identity undergoing change, evolution and adaptability. Nevertheless, for IPL what has not changed in these fifty years is its unwavering, unrelenting and unflinching 'Focus on Farmer'. Understanding the needs of the farming community and assisting them in good as well as bad times has been the driving force behind IPL's sales promotion and extension activities. Agriculture is the essence of not only the economy, but also of the culture and this is reflected in the large number of harvest festivals and other traditions centered on farming. Our ever-growing population demands constant effort to increase agricultural production. It is, however, equally important to innovate methods and techniques to ensure that our country remains self-sufficient.

IPL – EVOLUTION

THE EVOLUTION OF IPL STARTED SOMETIME before the seeds of "Green Revolution" got sown in the bed of Indian Agriculture. During 1955, a joint stock company by the name of Indian Potash Supply Agency (IPSA) was set-up by the then Ministry of Commerce and Industry consisting of all the leading importers of fertilisers as its shareholders. IPSA, thus, become the sole entrusted agency for import handling, promotion and marketing of Potash in the entire country. IPSA's work on Potash promotion was recognised by the farmers across the nation, and was well appreciated by the Sivaraman Committee on Fertilisers as well as the National Commission on Agriculture. Thereafter, to come up to the expected challenges because of introduction of HYV seeds, it was decided to strengthen IPSA by broadening its capital base. In 1970, IPSA was converted into Indian Potash Limited (IPL) and its membership base was expanded to include cooperative sector institutions and public sector companies.

The Government of India deserves appreciation for structuring IPL's share capital in such a way that it represents almost all the stakeholders in fertiliser and agriculture sectors. The entire co-operative sectors at all the levels– districts, state and national, is represented fairly well with NCDC (a Government of India statutory body to plan, promote and finance the development of agriculture co-operatives) as well as state level co-operative federations as its members, which ensures enhanced reliability, accountability and transparency in the functioning of IPL.

In our efforts to ensure adequate supply of MOP and other fertilisers in the country and to avoid shortage of MOP especially which is 100% imported, we had right from the beginning created infrastructure in all the major and minor ports in India to receive cargo as and when required. This includes handling of vessels, storage and transportation to various centres by rail and road in the country to enable the distribution network to make availability of MOP at the consuming points, i.e., at the doorsteps of the farmers. It will not be an understatement to say that IPL created infrastructure in most of the minor ports which are serving the nation well even now. The handling of latest vessels – Panamax was introduced by IPL through Gujarat ports as most of the major ports were shying away from handling bulk dry fertiliser cargo. In short, it is only IPL in India which can handle fertilisers throughout India through any port.

Over the past 5 decades, IPL has been on a phenomenal growth path, which is well indicated by the increased consumption of Potash in the country from 10.3 thousand tonnes of K_2O in 1955-56 to 2.02 million tonnes in 2004-2005. Sale of all IPL fertiliser showed an increase from 11.8 thousand tonnes to 3.7 million tonnes, turnover rose from Rs. 3.43 million to Rs. 32.88 billion during the same period.

FROM FERTILISER TO OTHER AREAS OF SERVICES TO FARMERS

WE HAVE BEEN VERY CLOSELY WORKING with the rural sector in the country where directly our concern is to improve the well-being of the farmers. We have been supplying fertilisers and also educating the farmers for a gainful farming to improve their lifestyle and earnings through various methods. With this in mind, we entered into dairy products i.e. purchasing milk from farmers and selling under the brand name of `Dairy Fresh' to ensure that farmers are getting reasonable market price. The milk collected through village collection centres undergoes ultra-modern processing at the plant and the final product passes 20 stringent tests to be hygienic and wholesome. We are also supplying to the farmers good quality cattle feed produced in our own plant at Sikandrabad, distt. Bulandshahar (UP). The milk procured from the farmers are processed at our own plant at Kundli, distt. Sonepat (Haryana) for redistribution. These services are well-appreciated by the farming community and they prefer to purchase IPL cattle feed because of its quality and also supply milk to IPL dairy plant for getting prompt payment and other support.

In order to help the farmers during crisis such as death/accident in the family of farmer especially their breadwinner, we had provided to the farmers life insurance coverage for Rs. 1.00 lakh through M/s. IFFCO-TOKIO General Insurance Company in which IPL is also a partner. This benefit goes to the farmers even if they purchase a small quantity of fertiliser to the value of Rs.4,000/- only. Under this scheme, many of the poor farmers have been benefited throughout the country.

We have also formed "IPL farmers club" in our 'Golden jubilee year' to impart knowledge of various farming activities to farmers. To begin with, this club was formed in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and efforts are on to start in other states also. The aim of this club is to provide a forum to interact with the farmers and also to facilitate interaction among the farmers on their various activities related to agriculture and commodity purchases, sales, etc., There is a good response from farmers to this club.

PROMOTIONAL PROGRAMMES

INDIAN POTASH SUPPLY AGENCY (IPSA) forerunner to IPL was essentially created to introduce 'K' to Indian soil which was not known to Indian farmers during 50s. This was a time immediately after independence India was looking forward to aid to meet food requirements in the country. Farmers were using only urea and were not keen for balanced fertilisation. During this time, a dedicated team of agriculture workers from IPSA (IPL) commenced with all earnestness to propagate the use of 'K' and the benefits that derived from use of 'K' by conducting field demonstrations throughout the country. There were resistance from farmers to use 'K' – potash in the beginning due to various apprehensions such as crop getting damaged, etc., were few of the problems to be mentioned faced by IPL. With the determination and commitment shown by our earlier managers and agronomists, who continued the demonstrations and trials etc., were able to communicate to the farmers about the need for use of 'K' along with 'N' and 'P'. In this process, the productivity of crops increased gradually and with the green revolution taking place in the country, the role played by IPL has become very crucial in achieving the food stability what the country enjoying now.

IPL agronomists share their knowledge and experience in events like haats, field days, harvest festivals, farmers conferences, crop seminars, kisan melas, agro exhibitions, dealer training programmes, village adoption programmes, crop demonstrations, soil testing, fertiliser recommendation programmes and meeting at agro service centres. Various activities are organised including mass media programmes like screening of films as well as slides through audio-visuals vans and rural theatres, press publicity, radio jingles, road side hoardings, wall paintings, distribution of elaborately printed publicity literature like crop leaflets, hand bills; POP displays material such as posters, stickers, tin plates, glow signs, calendars and exhibition material. IPL field staff has been rendering excellent agronomic services without any commercial consideration thereby, acting as the farmers friend, philosopher and

First potash demonstration farmer being felicitated by Hon. Minister Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan during IPL Golden Jubilee function

Table 1 - Ongoing promotional activities undertaken by IPL

S.No.	Activities	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
1.	Crop demonstrations	132	703	1835
2.	Farmers meetings/training/ field days	210	411	998
3.	Crop seminars	23	32	48
4.	Intensive campaigns	282	300	306
5.	Agri. extension officials training	-	-	28
6.	Exhibitions	21	26	55
7.	Wall paintings (000 sq.ft.)	22	95	272
8.	Hoardings	-	120	150
9.	Audio-visual shows	2400	2016	2160
10.	Dealers trainings	26	28	28
11.	Literature distribution (000)	326	780	682
12.	Film production	1	2	1

guide by consulting on his farming business in totality. Promotional activities undertaken by IPL under various projects during the past three years are summarised in **Table 1**.

AV Vans and Films

In 1964, IPL put on road its first and possibly the fertiliser industry's first audio-visual van. This proved an instant hit. Initially still shots of crops, commentaries on judicious fertiliser use and relevant messages were shown which the rural community very well received. The number of vans increased. Presently eleven mobile audio-visual units have been deployed all over the country to educate farmers through films and slides on balanced fertilisation, improved crop production and other related aspects. Nonetheless, the farmers were not only interested in knowledge but also wanted information with entertainment. IPL recognised this need of the farmers and started making short films which besides amusing, inspiring and motivating farmers focused on delivering the message about improved agricultural practices, balanced use of fertilisers, etc., The promotional messages on potash applications and their benefits travel across the length and breadth through the audio-visual units and the mobile soil testing labs. Over half a century, it has produced fifty films including tele-films that have had contribution of the talented people like Muzaffar Ali, Shyam Benegal, S.S. Oberoi and Kiran Juneja. One of the films titled "Ashirwad Vigyan Ka" received Best Video Film Award (2003) from the Fertiliser Association of India. IPL was also first to introduce daylight screening in these units. Daylight screen is a compact portable plastic screen that can show bright pictures to a small audience of around 50-60 persons. Innovative media such as puppet shows have been devised and deployed regularly.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

SINCE THE 1990S, THE COMPANY HAS in conjunction with various international agencies carried out agricultural extension projects and implemented developmental projects at the village level. These have manifold objectives – of improving yields, of correcting the imbalance in fertiliser use, of increasing the livelihood sustainability, and rural development in its totality.

Indo-Canadian Agriculture Extension Project (ICAEP)

With the assistance of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), ICAEP was implemented in Barabanki, Meerut and Sultanpur districts of Uttar Pradesh to improve the agriculture production and to develop rural areas through extension and research.

Environment Improvement in Rainfed Areas (EIRA) Project

Following a contribution agreement between India-Canada environment facility (ICEF) and Indian Potash Limited (IPL), the project named as " Environment Improvement in rainfed areas (EIRA) project", was taken up in 60 villages (30 in district Chhindwara, (M.P.) and 30 in district Amrawati (Maharashtra). The project period was slated for five years starting April 1996. This was further extended till March 2003. The project was seen as an initiative towards evolving an innovative comprehensive programme of sustainable improvement in the environment quality of rain-fed areas and management of natural resources by community involvement.

The project worked towards achieving its aim by adopting a bottom-up approach, i.e., developing the programme from below and the local communities having control over the planning, implementation and management of natural resources. The community-based process oriented, participatory and empowering approach adopted by the project provided learning from the experiences within the project. The project is implemented with the help of "village environment committees" (VECs) constituted in each of the project villages. The VECs worked in coordination with the cluster supervisors (CS). The cluster supervisors worked under the guidance of subject matter specialist (SMS) and the district project manager (DPM).

Project interventions, in the form of activities focusing on soil and water conservation, energy conservation, afforestation, use of organic manure, improved the environmental balance. Certain interventions like installation of biogas plants had a great impact on deforestation. In such cases, the requirement of household for fuelwood was reduced to almost 'zero' level and the installation of bio gas plants resulted in less cutting of tress. Farm bunding resulted in an increase in production due to moisture conservation and check in soil erosion. The stop dams/check dams and

Table 2 - Achievements under EIRA project

Activity	Unit	
1. Soil and water conservation		
a. Farm bunding	Ha	6632.93
2. Afforestation		
a. Plantation on community land	No. of plants	1544054
b. Plantation on private land	No. of plants	817496
c. Nursery raising	No. of seeding	2154013
3. Composting		
a. Compost pit	No.	167
b. Nadep	No.	802
c. Vermi-compost	No.	91
d. Agriculture crop demonstration	No.	740
4. Check dam/stop dam		
a. Small (cost up to Rs. 50,000.00)	No.	8
b. Medium (50,000 to 2,50,000)	No.	27
c. Large (2,50,000 and above)	No.	3
d. Water reservoir	No.	9
5. Energy conservation and development		
a. Improved (iron) chullahs	No.	1157
b. Solar cooker	No.	127
c. Smokeless chullahs	No.	2002
d. Nutan stoves	No.	568
e. Preserve cooker	No.	633
f. Bio gas/ W.C.	No.	855
6. Community development		
a. SHG's/ UG's	No.	221
b. ERC	No.	30
7. Training and capacity building		
a. Training of villages groups	No.	53
b. Training to staff	No.	7
c. Exposure visit (trips)	No.	23
d. Training of VEC	No.	62
e. Workshops	No.	5

farm ponds increased the water level of wells. The plantation efforts and protection of forest land rise to greenery, check of soil erosion and change in atmospheric temperature. Energy conservation activities in addition to installation of bio-gas plants like house hold toilets, distribution of pressure cookers, smokeless and improved iron chullahs, Nadep and vermi-composting etc. were helpful not only in meeting out the need of extra energy resources but contributed to the good health of village people, particularly women. The development of village level institutions like village environment committees (VEC), self help groups (SHG) and user groups (UG) transformed the governance aspects in an organised manner to increase the participator process. Progress of the project activities for the five years period is given in the **Table 2**.

Potash Promotion Project ***(Correcting the Imbalance)***

This project was conceptualized after a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was entered into between International Potash Company (IPC), Moscow and Indian Potash Limited (IPL), New Delhi on 17th February 2003. The project was operationalised on 1st April 2003 for a period of three years.

The project comprises of a comprehensive programme for correcting the imbalance in fertiliser application in India by increasing the consumption of Potash to achieve N:K ratio of 4:1 in the long-run and at least 6:1 at the end of project period. Under this project, the approach is to propagate existing state fertiliser recommendations for increasing potash consumption. The project is operational in the following states: -

East zone : Orissa and West Bengal

West zone : M.P., Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Maharashtra

North zone : U.P., Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and H.P.

South zone : Kerala and A.P.

Under the project, field programmes of

Crop demonstration on balanced fertiliser use

Farmers meeting at village Changal (Sangrur), Punjab

farmer's education viz. Field demonstrations, field days/farmers meetings, crop seminars, intensive campaigns, agri. extension officers trainings were undertaken on large scale. Beside field programmes, mass media like hoardings, wall paintings. audio-visual shows, advertisement through press, radio and TV were also employed to create awareness about the balanced fertiliser application through enhancing the use of potassic fertilisers.

Technical information on the various aspects of potash in agriculture covering the topics rate of potash application, removal of potash by crops, potash fertility status, K deficiency symptoms on crops, method of K application etc. were published in the form of booklets, brochures, folders and posters. Folders and posters were provided to field in the language of the state. Result of crop demonstrations conducted were compiled, published and circulated for experience sharing. Agriculture magazines and periodicals were also used to create awareness about use of potash.

A 30 second radio jingle was prepared and released from 36 stations of All India radio. Similarly, 30 second TV jingle was also released in *Krishi Darshan* and other agricultural programmes of *Door Darshan* from various stations. Four mobile audio-visual units were added to the existing fleet of IPL. Project has made definite impact in creating awareness about use of K, which can be noted from the increase in K consumption in India during the project implementation period. N:P:K ratio also appreciably narrowed down to 5.5:2.2:1 (2004-05).

Collaborative Research Project on SOP

IPL and K+S Kali GmbH have undertaken collaborative research projects on sulphate of potash. Three projects with Dr. B.S. Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth, Dapoli distt Ratnagiri, Maharashtra; Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur; and Horticultural College and Research Institute, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, Coimbatore have concluded. It was observed that application of N (1.5 kg), P (0.500 kg) and K (1 kg) to alphanso mango tree in Ratnagiri area through sulphate of potash and foliar spray of 1% KNO_3 was promising for increasing flowering, fruit retention, fruit yield, fruit weight and reducing spongy tissue. In another study, it was observed that in Kerala average fruit weight and fruit yield per unit area were increased substantially by a higher dose of MOP and SOP than the present recommendations of 8 gm K_2O as MOP/plant. The study indicated that 15 to 24% increase in fruit yield of pineapple could be achieved by the application of 16 gm K_2O as MOP and SOP, respectively, than 8 gm K_2O as MOP recommended at a present – increase in fruit yield was always higher with SOP than with MOP. Studies on the efficacy of sulphate of potash on growth, yield and quality of banana at Coimbatore revealed that SOP application had appreciably improved many of the yield and quality traits. Post-shootings spray of SOP was taken up and it is concluded that SOP can be integrated in banana nutrition as foliar spray at 1.5% concentration applied twice first at the time of last-hand emergence and second 30 days thereafter so as to produce quality bunches.

Three other projects, 1."Evaluation of SOP for growth yield and quality of black pepper" with Indian Institute of Spices Research (ICAR), Calicut, Kerala; 2. "Efficacy of sulphate of potash on the growth yield quality and shelf life of tomato" with Horticulture College and Research Institute, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, Coimbatore; and 3. "Studies on the efficacy of sulphate of potash on yield and quality of mango under tropical belt of India" with Horticultural College and Research Institute, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, Periyakulam, are in progress and likely to be concluded in the year 2007.

The SOP project also have extension component through which various activities are carried out. IPL is also carrying out some extension programmes in collaboration with PPIC – India Programme.

Potash Research Institute of India (PRII)

In the year 1977, IPL promoted PRII as a national level research institute and provided funds of Rs. 4.5 crore. The primary objective of the institute is to conduct and encourage research on potassium and related plant nutrients in order to ensure better soil management and crop production, to serve as medium for exchange of information on the use of potassium in agriculture and to cooperate with universities and institutes in the

IPL block of school building at village Akkaraipetai (Nagapattinam), Tamil Nadu

fulfilment of these tasks.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

IPL, RIGHT FROM ITS INCEPTION, HAS BEEN doing various programmes to support the rural masses especially farming community throughout India. There were many programmes undertaken during the last 50 years for the benefit of the community in general and rural poor in particular. This also included contribution to various programme through government and NGOs. Organising medical camps in the rural areas has been one of the key activities under this head.

Tsunami Disaster of December 2004

As a corporate IPL has been discharging social responsibilities and notable among these was construction of the school building to accommodate six class rooms to replace the damaged class rooms due to tsunami in December 2004 at Akkaraipetai – a coastal village in Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu. The government school was totally damaged due to tsunami and the school lost many students along with the parents of students studying in that school. The new building was handed over to the school authorities in October 2005.

FUTURE STRATEGY TO SERVE THE FARMERS

THE GOVERNMENT CONTROL IN THE fertiliser field is gradually being phased out and market forces slowly asserting themselves. In this cataclysmically changing agri-business scenario, IPL firmly believes that a company, which is able to retain the loyalty of their customer-farmers, will be the winner. With this as its watchword, IPL is looking at various alternatives to forge newer and closer ties with farmers by becoming a stakeholder in their activities and working towards their prosperity.

To be a truly international corporate and to reflect the governments policy of enhanced trade with neighboring countries, IPL has opened its first foreign office in Colombo (Sri Lanka), where it hopes to replicate its magical success of the Indian market.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The main emphasis of IPL was on educating farmers about the balanced and efficient use of fertilisers for enhancing crop productivity, improving quality of farm produce and management of natural resources in environment friendly manner.

2. IPL has believed that providing extension services below a threshold level does not bring about desired change in the agricultural development and therefore adopted an area development approach by implementing intensive programmes through various projects.

3. Collaboration with other agencies, national and international, was found to be effective in rendering agricultural and rural development services.

4. Understanding farmers need and then designing and implementing extension programmes to enhance the prosperity of rural India has been the prime mover of extension services of IPL.